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## TITLE

CHILDREN'S LIVES. A STUDY OF CHILDREN'S  
PEER CULTURES WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO  
'RACE'

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# **CHILDREN'S LIVES**

**A STUDY OF CHILDREN'S PEER CULTURES**

**WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO 'RACE'**

**Richard Hatcher**

**submitted for the degree of PhD**

**University of Warwick**

**Department of Education**

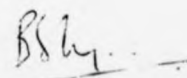
**August 1994**

## DECLARATION

Parts of chapters 8, 9, and 10 of this thesis were included in the book *Racism in Children's Lives* by Barry Troyna and Richard Hatcher, published by Routledge in 1992. However, all of the interviews with children in the research were conducted by Richard Hatcher, and all of the analysis and discussion of them in this thesis is his sole responsibility.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'R Hatcher', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Richard Hatcher

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'B Troyna', with a horizontal line underneath.

Dr Barry Troyna



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## SUMMARY

This thesis is a study of the cultures of children. Its principal perspective is sociological, though it draws heavily on the substantial body of work on children within the field of psychology. It also engages with work within the field of cultural studies, and in particular studies of youth cultures. The Gramscian perspective which informs much of the work in this area provides a theoretical framework for conceptualising children's cultures as partly autonomous from, but powerfully shaped by, ideologies and structures in the wider society.

The study makes special reference to issues of 'race' within children's cultures. A theoretical framework derived mainly from studies of 'race' and youth within the 'cultural studies' tradition provides the context for a critical engagement with work on social identity within the field of social and cognitive psychology.

The research on which the study is based was conducted with children in mainly-white primary schools. Most of them were aged 10 and 11. A smaller-scale follow-up study was carried out two years later when the children were at secondary school. The study adopts a qualitative methodology in order to explore the peer relationships and social interaction of children, and the extent and ways in which it may become racialised.

Its findings confirm and extend previous research on friendship and conflict in children's cultures. They contribute to an understanding of 'race' in children's lives by identifying the principal forms it takes and situating them within the cognitive and social processes of children's cultures. The distinction between the expressive and instrumental functions of name-calling and other forms of racist behaviour provides the basis for a theorisation of the 'thematic' ideologies of 'race' which embody children's beliefs and the 'interactional ideologies' which govern peer interaction, and the complex relationships between them.

## INTRODUCTION

Although the publication of the Opies' anthropological record of children's cultures (Opie and Opie 1959) revealed the complex social orders that children construct, childhood has scarcely been studied by sociologists. In 1980 Corsaro could write: 'few sociologists have studied either the social worlds of young children or children's acquisition of social knowledge. In contrast, psychology and anthropology have a growing literature on childhood culture and the development of interactive skills and social knowledge' (p208). The publication in 1982 of Chris Jenks' edited volume *The Sociology of Childhood* was an important step forward. In his introduction Jenks emphasised that 'Childhood is to be understood as a social construct'. In the context of a critique of both Parsons and Piaget, Jenks argues that the 'socialization' paradigm tends to 'gloss over the social experience of childhood' (p12). A decade later, the publication of three books which address childhood from a sociological perspective enables an assessment to be made of the progress that has been achieved towards developing a sociology of childhood.

The three books in question are *Childhood, Youth and Social Change: A Comparative Perspective* (Chisholm et al 1990), *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood* (James and Prout, 1990), and *Studying the social worlds of children* (Waksler 1991). A decade after Corsaro's assessment, to which Jenks' book is an exception, the picture of the field presented in these three books is not greatly

different. According to Chisholm et al, 'The social science of childhood still remains in its own infancy' (p5). Their view is echoed by one of the contributors to their volume, Diana Leonard, who begins her chapter: 'We have as yet only a poorly developed sociology of contemporary childhood in Britain, i.e. a sociology of the social position of babies, infants and 3-11-year-olds and their relationships with adults and with other children' (1990, p58). She compares the situation with that of the sociology of women and gender before 1970. Similarly, in the same volume Hood-Williams (1990, p157) affirms that 'The readiness to accept childhood as a social construct since as long ago as Aries (1962) has not been translated into sociological analysis. We are at a very early stage in learning how to think about these social relations, let alone how to research them. This means that we have to write at a far higher level of generality than we would like'.

It is perhaps not surprising, given the stage of development of the sociology of childhood, that the focus of all three books is on staking out a terrain and establishing a perspective on the concept of childhood, rather than exploring children's cultures themselves. Furthermore, the bulk of work within sociology in this area has concerned itself with the child in relation to the adult, either in the family context or, more recently, in the school context. As Prout and James say (1990, p9), 'sociologists have devoted little attention to childhood as a topic of interest in itself'. Leonard (1990, p59) points out that 'it is seldom children, but rather adults' relations with children - whom they control, or try to control, or to educate - which engages the researchers' interest'. '[I]t is...remarkable how rarely

sociologists have interviewed children, even of 9, 10 or 11 years old, or observed them in everyday settings in Britain'.

It is notable that all three books, in spite of their wider intentions, exemplify the limitations they identify. They are biased towards youth rather than childhood and focus on adult-child relations rather than children's cultures. The volume edited by Waksler (1991) has only one chapter on child-child relations, and that concerns 2-4 year olds. The two books edited by James and Prout (1990) and by Chisholm et al. (1990) deal only with the adult-child relationship, or the child in relation to adult society.

The theoretical task facing sociologists of children's culture is posed by Chisholm (1990). She is speaking of youth, but her points apply equally to children:

Agency and hegemony are linked together in an image of the active subject in constant struggle with structured and structuring contradictions; the struggles result in dynamic but systematic patterns of resistance and accommodation. [...] A comprehensive understanding of these processes requires a systematic analysis directed to *how* social-cultural reproduction occurs, shifts its forms, and is remodelled - not merely *in whose interest* these processes operate. We thus need a youth research which encompasses *the full range* of social individuals, social positions, life contexts, strategies and consequences. Equally necessary, however, is a youth research able to extrapolate structuring principles

which can provide sociological explanations for individual biographies.  
(1990, p38)

Prout and James rightly point out that to pose the task for researchers into childhood in this way connects the sociology of childhood directly to 'the major theoretical debate of contemporary sociology: that is, the problem of the relationship between agency (or 'action') and structure in social life' (1990, p27).

The value of a sociological dimension lies in its ability to provide a perspective on the social construction of children's cultures within the wider adult society. The starting-points for such a sociological project have been usefully outlined by Chisholm (1990).

Firstly, according to Chisholm it is important to integrate the study of youth and of childhood (1990, p6, p18). While sociologists have largely neglected childhood, they have developed a major area of study in relation to youth. This includes the seminal work within a marxist cultural studies framework emanating from the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (e.g. Hall and Jefferson 1976), and other approaches, for example work on 'football hooligans' (Dunning, Murphy and Williams 1988).

Secondly, Chisholm insists that the issue of 'race' must be built in to our thinking about childhood. Thirdly, the issue of gender must be integrated into any analysis. In spite of the criticism of the male bias of studies of youth cultures made by

McRobbie and Garber (1976) and other feminists, and studies published by them, Chisholm is still able to say more than a decade later that '[T]he marginalization of gender problematics and the distorted image of girls in youth studies is no longer a matter for argument' (1990, p38). Finally, Chisholm argues for 'vertical' as well as 'horizontal' dimensions to studies. What are needed are diachronic studies of children's cultures, , not just static synchronic studies (1990, pp39-41).

Though the research on which this study is based began before Chisholm's proposals for a research agenda were published, her programmatic principles provide a convenient summary of the basis of the present study. Its aim is to make a contribution, principally from a sociological perspective, to an understanding of children's culture, with particular reference to issues of 'race'.

The first three chapters are concerned with psychological and sociological perspectives on children's culture. Chapter 1 comprises an overview of research within the perspectives of the developmental and social psychology of children. In chapter 2 the focus is on conflict within children's culture. In chapter 3 the contributions of sociologists to an understanding of children's culture are assessed.

The next two chapters are concerned with issues of 'race' and children. Chapter 4 outlines and evaluates some key theoretical perspectives, while in chapter 5 the research on racist incidents among children is reviewed.



In chapter 6 the methodological issues underpinning my own research are discussed. Chapters 7 to 10 arise from my research in three primary schools. In chapter 7 some key aspects of the cultures of the children are examined. This establishes the context in which the ways issues of 'race' impact upon children's cultures are considered in chapters 8 and 9. Chapter 10 comprises four case-studies which exemplify the analysis contained in the preceding three chapters.

Finally, chapter 11, which is based on research carried out in two secondary schools with some of the same children two and three years later, examines changes in their cultures since they left primary school, again with a particular emphasis on issues of 'race'.

## CHAPTER 1

### PSYCHOLOGY AND CHILDHOOD

In contrast to sociology, children and childhood have been a principal subject of study by psychologists since at least the beginning of this century. Recent developments in the study of children in psychology have given rise during the past decade or two to a large body of research studies of aspects of children's cultures, social relationships and social development. These developments can be situated in the context of changing paradigms within child psychology, which are themselves embedded in wider developments in the discipline of psychology itself,

Until the mid-1960s the dominant paradigm within the field of child development was that of behaviourism. The concept of socialisation provided the framework for understanding social learning. Socialisation was seen as a unilateral process in which the passive child was shaped by the adult. The psychological mechanisms through which this process took place were imitation and reinforcement (Corsaro and Eder 1990).

Ingleby (1986) makes four criticisms of behaviourist developmental psychology. Firstly, it reified the status quo by treating cultural constructions, in this case that of children and childhood, as timeless and universal 'facts of nature'. Secondly, and

underpinning this approach, it was based on a positivist conception of psychology as a science, whose object was conceived as the individual abstracted from the social. The individual was seen as prior to the social, and social factors could therefore be separated out as secondary variables.

Thirdly, traditional developmental psychology focused on the individual.

Development was essentially individual development. Social factors were either treated as background, or transformed into and interpreted as psychological factors, as in explanations of social inequality in terms of psychological dispositions (abilities, attitudes, personality).

Fourthly, Ingleby criticises positivistic behaviouristic psychology for its denial of human agency. Children are not passively assimilated into the 'adult world' through unilateral processes of socialisation, they are active co-constructors of their social worlds.

In the 1960s positivism within the social sciences became subject to sustained criticism. In the field of human learning the two key figures who challenged the behaviourist paradigm were Chomsky and Piaget. Their central concern was cognition, precisely the issue omitted from the behaviourist agenda. Chomsky's devastating critique of Skinner's behaviourist theory of language acquisition was published in 1959. In the field of education Piaget became the dominant influence in a new focus on the development of children's thinking. At the heart of the cognitivist approach were a concern with the mental processes governing behaviour

and a conception of the human subject as actively constructing his or her social world. What was absent from it was a conception of 'the social' which might be more productive than that of the behaviourist approach.

In turn therefore the 'individual-constructionist' approach was subjected to criticism from a variety of perspectives which had in common a concern to integrate the 'individual' and the 'social'. An early influence on the emergence of social constructionism was Vygotsky (1962), who offered a critique of Piaget's individualistic developmentalism. Corsaro and Eder (1990, p199) argue that 'Vygotsky's views extend the constructivist emphasis on children's activities to emphasizing that such events are basic to producing and maintaining cultural systems'. For Vygotsky, 'in the child's acquisition of higher mental functions, defined as those mental processes that depend upon speech and language, every function appears twice: first on the social level and then on the individual level, first between people and later as internal to the child's cognitive system' (quoted in Butterworth 1983, p197). However, the extent to which mainstream psychology still is based on an individual-society dualism is illustrated by Valsin and Cairns' (1992) critique of the separation of the child from the environment that they see as typical of child psychology. According to Valsin and Cairns, 'one cannot hope to understand an individual's behaviour and beliefs independent of the social network in which he or she is embedded' (p31), yet even when psychologists take account of the environment, they tend to measure the subject and the environment separately and then try to establish correlations, rather than study them in their interrelationship.

The individual-society dualism that informs social constructionism has been the main target of a radical critique of social constructionist psychology from a post-structuralist standpoint, in particular under the influence of Foucault. *Changing the Subject* (Henriques et al 1984) is a crucial text in this respect. Its authors claim that the social constructionists are still prisoners of an individual-society dualism.

However, while there have been some studies of children from a post-structuralist viewpoint, most notably by Walkerdine (1983, 1984, 1985), the great bulk of work has been carried out, and continues to be, within a social constructionist framework.

It is these studies that will now be considered, and in particular those that deal with children's social development in middle childhood.

#### **MIDDLE CHILDHOOD**

In his preface to his edited volume *Development During Middle Childhood* (1984), Collins comments that 'development during the 6-12 age period has received less attention from the research community than the periods of infancy, the preschool years, and adolescence' (p ix). In the same volume Hartup observes that the social world of children in middle childhood has been seldom studied: 'The time that children spend together and the nature of their interactions when they are on their own are not well documented. The frequencies of their activities and the structures of the social interactions remain unstudied' (1984, p242). And again, 'we have no clear idea about where children spend time when they are on their own, let alone what social experience is like in these places' (p254). He continues: 'One of our

most severe gaps in our knowledge of the social psychology of middle childhood is information about the structure and functioning of informal groups' (p254). These assessments of the state of the field indicate that it is a body of research that is very much work in progress, even if the picture has become clearer in the subsequent ten years.

A useful starting point is offered by Corsaro and Eder (1990) who identify the central themes of peer culture as: sharing and participation; attempts to deal with fears, concerns and conflicts; personal relationships and identity; and resistance to adult authority. These four themes will serve to frame the analysis of the specificity of middle childhood.

Middle childhood marks the time when children have achieved much more independence from adults. Children spend more time in peer group activities, away from adults. Peer relationships become increasingly important in their lives. Middle childhood is a time when friendships stabilise. Play becomes more organised, often based on games with formal rules. Children in middle childhood are much more knowledgeable of the ways that social forces shape behaviour. Skills for self-presentation and impression-management develop (Fine 1980). Children form groups, based on social attraction and common interest. Eleanor Maccoby (1986), in an overview of the research evidence, points to the prevalence of gender-segregation and summarises the differences between male and female childhood cultures. Boys' play is more public (the street, the recreation ground). Girls are more likely to play at home. Boys tend to play in larger groups, girls in twos or threes. Play in boys'

groups is rougher, with more fighting. Social encounters among boys tend to be oriented around issues of dominance and the formation of a pecking order. Among girls there is a strong convention of turn-taking. Boys' groups are less intimate, more public. Girls' friendships tend to be 'intensive', boys' 'extensive'.

## **PEER RELATIONSHIPS**

In this section the nature of peer relationships in middle childhood will be examined more closely. Hartup (1986) points out that there are different kinds of peer relationships, and that they vary along the dimensions of intensity and exclusivity, as indicated by the following classification of five types of peer integration:

- Intimate friends - either exclusive or in addition to other relationships;
- Partners - children who move back and forth from social networks to alliances with one or two other children, but on a non-intimate basis;
- Mates - children who are members of a wider social network and who have either high or low social power;
- Ramblers - children who oscillate between solitary activities and social participation without establishing enduring relationships, and who are either accepted or rejected;
- Isolates - children who have very few interactive partners.

This provides a context for focusing upon friendship relations.

## CHILDREN'S FRIENDSHIPS

The study of children's friendships is a relatively new field of enquiry within psychology. Less than fifteen years ago Mannarino (1980, p59), in an overview of studies of children's friendships, stated that 'the study of children's friendships is still in its earliest days', and suggested that 'friends may play a more significant role in the socialization process than was once thought'.

Damon (1977) argues that the basis of friendship is liking, an affective bond that is not reducible to other factors. There is also general agreement that, in the words of Hartup (1993, p177): 'The essentials of friendship are reciprocity and commitment between individuals who see themselves more or less as equals' (p177). But friendship is also a social institution which serves a number of functions. Allan (1989), in one of the few sociological studies of friendship, although one which focuses on adults rather than children, identifies four functions of friendship:

- It allows participation in social activities;
- It provides companionship and intimacy;
- It provides personal support: moral, emotional, and material;
- It is a source of identity and status.

Allan sees friendship as central to everyday life because it can provide flexible and particularistic responses to problems: 'friends, generically defined, often act as a resource that can be drawn on to help people achieve their particular goals or cope with the contingencies they face. That is to say, friendship often has a social utility



which is quite central to its character. This aspect of friendship is often pushed into the background, no doubt partly because at a cultural level the relationship is not supposed to be defined in instrumental terms' (1989, p154).

A number of writers have attempted to identify the functions of friendship among children in middle childhood, in ways that are congruent with Allan's analysis (e. g. Bukowski and Hoza 1988; Fine 1980; Hartup 1992). They can be summarised as follows:

1. Friendship enables participation in social activities. It is thus a reliable source of pleasure. Fine (1981, 1987) sees friendship as a 'staging area for interaction'. The friendship bond allows a wide latitude of behaviour, including behaviour which might otherwise be socially disapproved, but which friends regard with tolerance, granting 'idiosyncrasy credits'.
2. Friendship is a cultural resource for problem-solving. It furnishes material, social, and psychological support. Friendship relationships are 'contexts in which basic social skills are acquired or elaborated (e.g. social communication, cooperation, and group entry skills)' (Hartup 1992c, p194). For Fine (1981), friendship is a cultural institution, transmitting and relaying cultural information - a stock of social knowledge and behavioural strategies - relevant to growing up.

3. Friendship allows psychological intimacy. Sullivan (1953) suggests it provides opportunities for intimate disclosure and so promotes the growth of interpersonal sensitivity. (The importance of 'secrets' for children is a case in point).

4. Friendship is an important institution through which the culture of society is transmitted to the individual. (For example, it is perhaps the most important social context in which children learn about sex).

5. Friendship is an important source of identity. Fine (1981) speaks of friendship as 'a shaper of the social self', and therefore a crucial factor in the development of identity and self-image. Friends continually shape each other's identities, through views of the world presented in conversation and narratives, through humour and ribbing about pretence, and by providing models. The basis of friendship in liking ensures that the self is positively validated in social interaction with friends. Sullivan (1953) suggests that it offers consensual validation of interests, hopes and fears, and thus bolsters feelings of self-worth. Youniss (1983, p172) agrees that 'friends seek validation in purposeful exposure of self through discourse', but he notes that this requires trust that exposure will not lead to domination.

### **Friendship groups**

Besag (1989, pp83-86) draws on a number of studies to suggest that the group offers its members: a surrogate family; standards and rules; self-knowledge; protection; identity; friendship; attainment of common aims. The preadolescent friendship

group provides a site for interaction that is distinctive in being out of the direct control of adults. One consequence is that it provides a setting for the expression of attitudes and behaviour which would be negatively sanctioned by adults, such as the verbal exploration of sexuality, and pranks and other forms of delinquent behaviour. It also allows for behaviour between friends which is either only possible within the friendship group (e.g. breaking and making friends) or would have a different meaning outside the friendship group (e.g. fighting). Gottman and Mettetal (1986; also Parker and Gottman 1988) suggest that middle childhood is characterised by an unprecedented need for group belonging. 'In middle childhood, children are very concerned with the norms of the same-sex peer group, figuring out which actions will lead to acceptance and inclusion and which to exclusion and rejection. Much of their conversation, which may at times occur in the context of coordinated play, has a "we against others" quality. The coordination of play is no longer the goal of the interaction. Not being rejected by the peer group is the goal' (1986, p197). According to Parker and Gottman (1989), the most salient social process in middle childhood is gossip, primarily negative gossip. Its function is both 'to reaffirm membership in important same-sex peer social groups and to reveal the core attitudes, beliefs and behaviors that constitute the basis for inclusion in or exclusion from these groups' (p114). Gossip is a social device for maintaining social boundaries between insiders and outsiders. It affirms the social norms and values of a particular network.

### **The development of friendship**

The developmental aspect of friendship during childhood is also a relatively recent focus for research. Bigelow and La Gaipa (1980, p15) state that 'Relatively little is known as yet about what children expect from their friends, how these expectations change over time and the impact of such social cognitions on friendship choice'. On the basis of their research they suggest the following three developmental stages of friendship expectations among children in early and middle childhood:

- Common activities, evaluation, propinquity
- Character admiration
- Acceptance, loyalty and commitment, genuineness, common interests, intimacy potential.

Rubin (1980) discusses the development of friendship in terms of changes in three dimensions of social understanding, representing a move from the concrete to the abstract:

- progress in ability to take the other's point of view
- a change in viewing people in terms of physical attributes to psychological attributes
- a change in social relationships from conjunctural (encounters) to long-term (relationships).

## A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE ON CHILDREN'S SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

The development of children's social understanding and social relationships will now be considered from a more theoretical point of view. The starting point for current research in this area is generally agreed to be an early work of Piaget: not the more familiar work on stages of nonsocial cognitive development, but his ideas about *The Moral Judgement of the Child* (1932). The seminal point he established, and on which recent work by other social psychologists is based, is the idea that peer relations are crucial for the social development of the individual child. Recent work has challenged Piaget's notion of egocentricity in infancy, and shown that peer relations play a significant role at a much earlier age than Piaget supposed, but that does not detract from the validity of Piaget's basic thesis. (See Rubin and Ross, 1982, for a brief historical overview).

According to Piaget, the child's development of the concept of social justice is as follows. Up till age 5, justice means obedience to authority - the rules laid down by parents. By age 7-8, as a result of the experience of cooperative play with peers, the child has developed a concept of justice based on equality. By age 11-12, as a result of the child's growing awareness of individual differences, she or he has developed the concept of equity (i.e. of equality modified to take account of difference). (See Leahy 1983). Piaget sees this as a developmental progression, parallel to that in nonsocial cognition (from concrete to formal operations).

In terms of moral development, Piaget distinguishes between the 'morality of constraint' engendered in the early years within the hierarchical relationship between the child and the adult, and the 'morality of cooperation'. According to Kutnick (1988, pp79-80):

Collective understanding and mutuality are the bases to Piaget's further stage of moral development, the 'morality of cooperation'. Unlike the morality of constraint, the morality of cooperation can develop only amongst peers, or children of an equal status. It is in the environment of equals that children are free to explore the differences between their perceptions and understandings of rules and justice. Children come from a home/adult-dominated set of rules and modes of interaction. They quickly find that these are not an adequate background for the relationships they wish to develop amongst themselves. With their different backgrounds and understanding of rules, children who wish to play with one another must learn to adapt and negotiate. The understanding of intentionality becomes more fully developed. In the interests of those children concerned, rules become changeable or mutable to maintain play... Through the strength of mutuality, the peer group becomes a viable alternative to the imposition of hierarchical constraints.

Cooperation between peers provides the basis for a new kind of morality. Piaget distinguishes between *heteronomous* morality based on fixed external rules and

typical of the adult-child relationship, and *autonomous* morality based on negotiated rules generated within the peer relationship. (These new social processes developed within the peer relationship subsequently transfer to the adult-child relationship, as for example, adult authority is relativised and questioned. See Gottman and Mettetal 1986, p213).

Piaget's thesis is based on a bipolar ideal type model, which has been subjected to criticism. Emler (1983) points out that 'Constraint and cooperation are idealisations; relations with parents are not exclusively relations of constraint and relations with peers are never purely cooperative' (p148). And, as Kutnick says (1983), constraint (loyalty, obligation, peer pressure) also applies within the peer group.

These criticisms need to be taken on board, but they do not invalidate Piaget's central thesis, which Berndt (1982) sums up as follows: 'Children's orientation towards moral issues mirrors the structure of their most important social relationships' (p254). In middle childhood, 'The practice of free and open discussions where everyone's opinions have an equal chance to be heard leads naturally to a belief that fairness demands equality in treatment and in outcomes; that is, the principles that underlie interactions between peers determine the principles for the fair distribution of resources' (p255). Thus, children's social learning does not come primarily from modelling adult friendships (Rubin 1980). It is a product of the child's social interaction with peers.

There are two lines of theoretical development that have stemmed from Piaget's work on children's social development. One represents the attempt to integrate Piaget's work on social cognition with his theory of the development of non-social cognition. The best known representative of this tradition is Lawrence Kohlberg (1976). He criticised Piaget's developmentalist model on the grounds that the stages as defined by Piaget were not structurally unified systems of thought analogous to, and linked with, Piaget's conception of the stages of non-social cognitive development. In attempting to theorise them in this way, Kohlberg abandoned the crucial element in Piaget's approach, the grounding of children's moral development in their social relationships. Kohlberg's position was, in Emler's view, that moral development is 'a process in which both the direction and the dynamics of change are located within the individual. Moral development is a self-generating process which springs from the internal logic of thought' (Emler 1983, p145). Kohlberg's argument that moral development is based on stages of logical thought, not on social relationships, represents a rationalist, individualist and cognitivist retreat from Piaget's thesis, which is grounded in collective social interaction.

A number of writers have attempted to develop theories of the stages of development of children's social-cognitive understanding, grounded in social interaction and social relationships. Damon (1977), who focuses on the development of notions of social justice, proposes a six-level model of children's reasoning about social justice, moving from sharing in early childhood to the development of notions of equality and reciprocity through interpersonal interaction, and the separation in adolescence of justice from interpersonal relationships. A



similar approach is adopted by Selman (1980, 1981) who focuses on processes of conflict resolution and suggests a developmental pattern in which children develop from physicalistic and momentary conceptions to mutual and language-based ones. These entail changing conceptions of individuality and interpersonal relationships (Dunn and Slomkowski 1992; Rubin and Rose-Krasnor 1992). Central to his developmental model of social-cognitive development is perspective-taking. He proposes five levels, from egocentric to societal-symbolic, the last of which is reached in adolescence.

These cognitive-developmental approaches to social development are subject to the same type of criticisms that have been levelled against Piaget's cognitive-developmental theory of non-social development. Donaldson (1986) demonstrates the effects, neglected by Piaget, of situation on interpretation and therefore reasoning. In terms of social development, Harre (1986) offers a more radical critique, arguing that ethnographic studies of children, such as Davies (1982) and Sluckin (1981), have

shown how mythical is the idea of 'moral development'. Children, post five years of age, like adults, make strategic, situationally differentiated uses of the whole gamut of those styles of moral reasoning that were supposed to be the rungs of a developmental scale. (p287)

Harre cites as evidence Olive Stevens' book *Children Talking Politics* (1982), in which she uses a Piagetian framework which she recognises does not fit her data:

some of her 9 year olds were disproving Piaget, engaging in genuine philosophical thinking about the goals, principles and moral foundations of society.

### **James Youniss**

The other tradition deriving from Piaget's work on social development has emphasised the *social* character of the developmental process. Perhaps the most important contemporary representative is James Youniss (1980). Emler (1983) summarises Youniss' position as follows:

Youniss proposes that the underlying thesis should be thought of not as being particularly concerned with types of moral judgement, but as being concerned with the child's adaptation to society through discovery of the principles by which social relationships are ordered. The child is born into a network of social relationships in which he or she comes to participate. These relationships take different forms and each form is characterized by particular principles of operation or 'methods' of interacting. The child's moral knowledge is knowledge about forms of social relationship, constructed in particular social relationships by the child and the other participants; this knowledge is thus a collective achievement. (pp148-9)

Youniss has synthesised the work of Piaget and that of Harry Stack Sullivan, an American psychiatrist (Sullivan 1953; Youniss 1983). Sullivan argued, contrary to

orthodoxy in psychology in the immediate post-war period, that, in Youniss's words, 'the individual is understandable only from the perspective of the relationships in which the individual has membership' (1983, p161). Drawing on Mead, Sullivan saw the individual self as constructed and understood through reciprocity, the feeding-back to the self of the response of the other. Sullivan, like Piaget, saw the child's relationships with parents and with peers as qualitatively different. The peer-relationships in which the child engages after infancy, with the development of decentring, are based on a genuinely collaborative negotiation of social reality between equals, whereas adult-child relations are governed by the adult's authority. Cooperation in this sense depends upon the ability to move away from an egocentric viewpoint and take the perspective of the other.

Developing what he calls the Sullivan-Piaget thesis, Youniss argued that from early childhood children enter into peer relations, which represent a new type of social relationship distinct from the child-adult relationship (1980, p29ff, p165ff). The initial basis of peer relations (i.e. from about 5-8) is joint activity. (Cf Gottman 1986, p139). In order to accomplish it children have to negotiate rules of interaction. The principle on which they are based is *direct reciprocity*, i. e. 'I do to you what you do to me'. Direct reciprocity is contrasted with the governing principle of relations with adults, *complementary reciprocity*, in which the child is in a very subordinate position and tends to act in conformity with the anticipated wishes of the adult (Youniss 1980, p228ff).

Direct reciprocity 'discourages formation of a stable interpersonal relationship' (p230) because it brings children together or drives them apart according to situation. This causes problems which the child comes to consciously recognise and respond to, during the years 8-10, by developing a new sort of peer relationship, based on two interrelatedly developed principles (p71). The first is that the notions of equality and reciprocity are reconstituted not as pragmatic rules of joint activity but as ideal principles of relationships, based on cooperation and equal treatment. The second is the growth of understanding of the individual. (See also Kutnick 1988, pp72ff). 'The most important lesson which children learn with peers is that social business can be transacted smoothly only through a joint agreement to practice reciprocity for mutual ends' (Youniss 1980, p271). From about 9 years children develop friendships on the basis of this voluntary cooperation (p238). Prior to then, friendship was based pragmatically on joint activity (p188). Older children understand the ongoing structure of friendship, and that it includes conflict and ways of resolving conflict. Thus, as Emler says (1983, p140), moral development is not just a process of internalising cultural values, as in social learning theory, but of 'intellectual growth and developing insight into the bases of social arrangements'.

Finally, as children move from middle childhood to early adolescence, in the period from 10-14 years, cooperation becomes based on greater psychological intimacy: 'cooperation was elaborated as friends not only adjusted to needs but openly came to each other revealing problems and admitting difficulties. A fuller grasp of the relation as an enduring entity was evident in adolescents' descriptions of mutual

understanding, intimacy and exclusivity. All of these changes may be seen as logical outcomes of the structure of cooperation...' (Youniss 1980, p231).

### **Reciprocity**

Social cognition and social interaction mutually influence each other. Piaget (1932) argues that play is a crucial factor in the development of a child's role-taking ability, including conflict: playing different roles reveals differences in perspective which must be resolved in order for play to continue. For Youniss, following Piaget, the notion of reciprocity as an ideology arising out of the experience of peer interaction is central. Other recent writers have also seen the notion of reciprocity as central to children's peer relationships in middle childhood. Davies (1982) identifies three aspects of social cognition: empathy and role-taking; children's understanding of the concept of friendship; and how children interpret social behaviour, for instance the attribution of intentionality to acts. She sees reciprocity, 'the active reflecting back to the other of the other's self', as one of the key 'critical constructs' of children's culture: 'I am a mirror to you which provides you with my perception of your behaviour towards me' (p76. See also Pollard 1985, p48). As Woods notes (1987, p114), this is Mead's notion of the internalisation of the 'me', the social self.

Because they are based on an affective bond, it is friendship relations that are the most potent context for the process of social development that Youniss and Davies have described. Sullivan (1953) made a distinction between friends and peer-relations in general. Both are based on reciprocity, but friendship, from about 9

years onwards, is based on a more advanced conception of reciprocity, based on a cooperative understanding and use of individual psychological differences. In Youniss's words (1983, p169), from about 9 years 'friends are persons who use differences for the sake of individual benefit'. Youniss defines the 'two fundamental elements of friendship, the foremost being cooperation for mutual benefit, and underlying it is children's understanding of individual differences. The two seem to be inextricably interwoven' (p175). Mannarino (1980, p46) argues that, contrary to most studies of children's friendships, 'this concept of reciprocity is *the* essential component of friendship'. The importance of the friendship group to the development of reciprocity is that it provides a non-threatening arena in which the responses of others can be explored, and on the basis of which social rules can be constructed.

The argument so far outlined seems to be a powerful one, in terms of providing the basis of an understanding of children's social development as rooted in peer interaction. However, although it avoids the abstract formalism of Kohlberg's cognitive developmentalism, it still shares some of the limitations of Piaget's conception of the social. As has been already suggested (Harré 1986), it neglects situational factors. McGurk (1993), in an overview, identifies two key themes of childhood social development. It arises out of interaction, and it takes place within cultural settings, which researchers need to take more account of (p2). Emler (1983, p141) points out that 'the judgements children make depend in part on a variety of task characteristics' (p141). Research within psychology on the child's development of social knowledge has been mainly influenced by cognitive developmental theory,

and therefore even when it has acknowledged the importance of social context, this recognition has, in Corsaro's words (1980), 'rarely inspired the direct study of young children's behavior in peer environments' (p209). Corsaro quotes Speier's assessment: 'traditional perspectives have overemphasized the tasks of describing the child's developmental process of growing into an adult at the expense of the direct consideration of what the events of everyday life look like in childhood' (p209). Similarly, Foot (1980, p267) says that 'the concentration of research effort [ . . . ] has been directed at the genesis and development of friendships rather than at the dynamics of friendship in children's social encounters'.

One aspect of interaction within social settings is how children attribute intentions and dispositions to others. This is a relatively recent area of research. 'We are currently gaining insights into what children are capable of in terms of attribution, less clear is the extent to which these capabilities reflect how they actually process social information in the real world' (Erwin 1993, p50). Children need to anticipate the behaviour of others, and interpret it, in order to act in the social world. Younger children's perceptions tend to be bounded by the concrete situation. From about nine years they use information of traits and dispositions to recognise the underlying consistency that underlies behaviour in different situations (Erwin 1993, p51). Some light is shed on this issue by Krasnor (1982), from an information-processing perspective. She suggests that the greater the processing of social information (i. e. the greater the sensitivity to the specific features of the social situation and task), the greater the differentiation of behaviour across situations. By 'differentiation of

behaviour' she means both variation in goals and variation in strategies. She argues that the greater the behavioural differentiation, the greater the social success.

Situations exist of course within a historical context, and behaviour in each new setting is strongly influenced by previous experiences and the expectations derived from them. Leahy (1983), commenting on Youniss, points out that the rules of reciprocity are not constructed each time anew by children, they are handed on through peer culture: 'many conventions, rules, or principles are 'constituted' or given in the acculturation process by previous generations. Thus, the outcome of socialization may, for some, be adherence to rules constituted and not up for negotiation by the child and his or her peers' (p317).

## CONCLUSION

In this chapter a critical assessment has been made of social psychological perspectives on childhood. The characteristics of children's friendships have been described, and their underlying principles of equality and reciprocity have been identified.

The notion of peer culture emphasises that children's peer interaction and social development is a collectively and historically accomplished process. It also directs attention to the interaction between children's subcultures and the wider cultures and structures of the adult society. This relationship is inadequately theorised by all the writers referred to up to now, and represents a further limitation of the Piagetian



conception of the social. It is a principal theme of chapters three, four and five, both in general and with specific reference to 'race'. However, before widening the focus, it is necessary to begin to examine the dimension of children's peer relationships that is central to this study, and that is the issue of conflict.

## CHAPTER 2

### CONFLICT IN CHILDREN'S RELATIONSHIPS

The focus of this chapter is on conflict among children. It begins with a clarification of three terms: conflict, aggression and competition. Hartup (1989, p59) defines conflict as 'an opposition between two individuals'. Competition 'refers to an interdependency between two individuals such that the attainment of rewarding outcomes by one constrains the attainment of rewards by the other'. Hartup suggests that situations which are particularly likely to provoke competition among friends are those which are most relevant to the child's sense of personal identity and positive self-image. Perry, Perry and Kennedy (1992) distinguish between conflict and aggression. Aggression is behaviour aimed at harming another person, whereas conflict is a state that exists when one person opposes another. Not all conflict is aggression, most is not. And some aggression is one-sided, in situations where there is no conflict.

Youniss (1992) criticises Piaget's conception of the acquisition of social morality because it idealises peer relations: peers do not always act to establish equality. Friends compete as well as cooperate, and on an unequal basis. Writers within the Piagetian tradition have tended to focus on cooperation rather than conflict. For example, in the last paragraph of his book *The Social World of the Child* (1977,

pp342-3) William Damon notes the absence in it of a conceptualisation and investigation of conflict:

Finally, our chosen focus on children's knowledge of social relations, transactions, and regulations has led us to emphasize the aspects of social knowledge which enable a child to become integrated into society. Social knowledge also performs a differentiating function, enabling one to distinguish oneself from others and to establish a unique social identity. Many activities and concepts that serve this function in childhood appear on the surface to be antisocial, even though they serve this crucial social identity function. For example, a child's knowledge of hostility, of enemies, of cruelty and of fighting seems to be quite opposed to the kinds of social knowledge that we have studied in this book. In actuality, these "antisocial" kinds of knowledge are an important complement to the concepts studied in this book. In informing a child about himself in relation to others, such concepts are an important means by which the child differentiates persons from one another and from himself. The development of such social concepts, which has yet to be investigated, is a vital companion to the development of the "social-integrating" concepts which have been the focus of this book.

A similar absence can be found in Kutnick's (1988) *Relationships in the Primary School Classroom*, in the sections on 'the world of peers' and 'the relational worlds of

the child (pp69-90). Conflict is inadequately integrated into his presentation. He notes that 'Peers generally display 'pro-social' or positive behaviours towards one another' (p73), and then goes on to discuss variations in peer behaviour, but without mentioning conflict. He then deals with types of peer groupings, and touches on inter-group conflict with reference to Sherif's Robber's cave experiment (pp81-2). What he *doesn't* show is what relation this experiment has to conflict within the normal school context, if any. On page 85 he gives a chart of moral development: conflict and anti-social behaviour do not feature, though he warns that 'Teachers should also remember that relationships among children are not always of the mutual and egalitarian character posed in this chapter' (p87).

Shantz and Hobart (1988), in an overview of work within developmental psychology, state that conflict has not been studied much, for two reasons. The focus has been on individual behaviour rather than relationships: either aggressive behaviour towards peers or non-compliance with adult authority. And the dominant paradigms in social development have been psychanalytic theory and social learning theory, both of which have focused on the child as the passive object of socialisation. The concern has been with the remediation of aggression rather than the interactive process itself.

While conflict is clearly somewhat marginal to a number of fields of study within child psychology, there is a body of recent work in the social psychology of children which is centrally concerned with the issue of conflict.

## THE EXTENT OF CONFLICT

First, there is the question of the extent of conflict among children. Most investigators use disagreement frequency as the measure of conflict, but, as Hartup points out (1992b, p188), 'Rate measures actually reveal a relatively small amount about the disagreements occurring between children, and yet, time and again, these measures are the only criterion variables used. Recognition also needs to be given to the interior dynamics of the conflict episode'. For example, disagreements arising during ongoing interaction are less likely to involve aggression and will be shorter.

Shantz and Hartup (1992), in an overview of research, state that observation in natural settings, in contrast to laboratory experiments conducted within a learning theory paradigm, showed that aggression usually occurs during conflict, and it often occurs alongside *prosocial* behaviour, as children try to manage conflict. They also conclude that most conflicts do not involve aggression. Valsin and Cairns (1992) point out that conflict seems to imply 'exclusive separation', but often involves mutual dependency. It is the difference between approaches based on 'exclusive partitioning' and 'inclusive partitioning'. In the latter,

conflict can be defined in terms of the *nature of linkages between the differentiated parts of a whole*. These linkages can be viewed as involving *opposition* between the parts. These oppositions (including conflict as a subclass of oppositions) make it possible for the parts to coexist, or temporarily transform into one another. Thus, the

'harmonious play' of children may become transformed into a 'fight' and vice versa, where *both* states of the children's relationships indicate 'friendship' by both children. (p25).

So opposites like cooperation and competition cease to be mutually exclusive and become interdependent and coexistent. This is true even of relationships between children who are 'enemies' of each other, as Hartup notes (1992b, p211n): 'Relational interdependencies also exist between children who dislike one another. Relatively little is known about 'enemies', but their interactions are clearly mutually regulated, and their relations cannot be regarded as independent'.

There is conflicting evidence as to whether conflict among children is greater among friends than among nonfriends. Dunn and Slomkowski (1992), in an overview of research into the relational contexts of conflict, conclude that the research evidence shows that there is more disagreement between friends than nonfriends (Gottman and Parkhurst 1980), and more criticisms of friends than nonfriends (Nelson and Aboud 1985). Children display more hostility to close associates than to nonassociates (Hinde et al 1985). Hartup (1992b) refers to a study by Laursen (1989) of 15 and 16 year olds. Conflicts with friends were nearly four times as frequent as conflicts with nonfriends, and proportionately even more when frequency of interaction was taken into account. Hartup himself (1992b) conducted a study of 7 year olds who, when asked to recall a conflict, mostly recalled conflicts with friends. More than 50% of them involved behavioural issues: teasing, name calling, psychological harm. In contrast, 20% entailed physical harm. Reviewing

the evidence, Hartup (1992b) concludes that conflict may be common among friends. In his view the key feature is not the absolute frequency of conflict but the proportion of disagreement to agreement. There is also some evidence that friends are more likely to resolve conflicts more equitably and through negotiation. (See also Hartup 1992a). However, Berndt and Perry (1986) found that children between 7 and 11 said they had fewer conflicts with friends than nonfriends, and children of 13 said they had about the same. These comparisons involved intense conflicts, so methodological differences may account for discrepancies. Hartup (1993, p185) suggests that 'Conflicts between friends are less intense and resolved more frequently by mutual disengagement than conflicts between nonfriends (Hartup et al 1988); competition is less intense'. But Berscheid (1986) points out that close relationships are often high on negative emotions as well as positive. One principal reason is that children initiate conflicts in order to change their friends so they conform more closely to the child's conception of appropriate friendship behaviour.

Perhaps Hartup's conclusion will serve as an indication of the current state of research knowledge in this area. 'Overall, then, we do not know a great deal about the relation between friendship and conflict'. Furthermore, 'we know far too little about the interaction between friendship status and the situational context as determinants of cooperation and competition among children' (1992b, p63).

## CONFLICT AND DEVELOPMENT

A number of writers comment on a tendency within the literature on conflict among children to see it solely in negative terms. Cairns and Cairns (1986) warn against equating children's development with progress and advance. 'Although we agree there is a need for a more balanced focus to the nature of social development, we harbor doubts about equating development with goodness and progress' (p320). This tendency reflects a functionalist perspective in which children who are not achieving friendship relations are seen as deficit systems who lack the requisite social skills. According to Valsin and Cairns (1992), models of development within child psychology are normally posed in terms of 'goodness-of-fit' between organism and environment. It is a model in which conflict is dysfunctional, and corresponds to a structural-functionalist consensus model of society. They contrast it with conflict models of development. Here they make a distinction between 'conflict maintenance' and 'conflict transformation'. In the former, conflict is central to each stage of development, but the stages are discrete and conflict does not play a role in impelling development towards a new stage. Conflict transformation theories are based on a dialectical conception of development as the product of novel syntheses of conflicting elements, as in the work of Vygotsky.

Shantz and Hobart (1989), speaking of conflict among children, state that 'Frequently, parents and teachers lament such episodes, [...] responding as if conflict is always a sign (if not a symptom) of failed socialization' (p71). In contrast, 'we believe conflict can serve social development, fostering both the self's individuation



and social connectedness' (p72). Dunn and Slomkowski (1992) identify three factors that make conflict a powerful learning experience: children's self-interest is engaged and threatened; complex emotions are aroused; and social rules, processes, and justifications are made explicit and discussed.

According to Hartup and Laursen (1993), conflict is both negative and positive for development. Negatively, it threatens the viability of relationships. Positively, it reveals and establishes common ground between individuals; it can be fun; and through it children become aware of social rules. Conflict reveals the psychological workings of others - their motivation, character traits etc - and develops perspective-taking of the other: 'to argue necessitates taking the attitude of the other at the same time as one contradicts it' (Maynard 1986, quoted in Hartup and Laursen 1993, p49). Similarly, Mannarino (1980, p49) quotes Wenar's remark that 'the alternation of periods of quarrelling and cooperation, far from being detrimental to children's notions of friendship, enables them to learn that differing and resolving differences are basic components of close interpersonal relations'.

Shantz and Hobart (1988) claim that conflict contributes to the self's individuation, for example in self-understanding, though they admit that 'the processes by which the self is constructed are virtually unknown' (p89). But it also can contribute to social connectedness, in three ways. It is a recognition of the significance of the behaviour of the other. It often arises out of problems of social integration, e.g. group entry. And conflict can lead to enhanced reciprocity of perspectives and hence a firmer basis for friendship, as Sullivan (1953) and Piaget (1932) both

propose. In Youniss's words (1980, p32), 'Children learn how to deal with differences of opinion. Specifically they construct procedures of *discussion, debate, argument, negotiation, and compromise*'.

In middle childhood children do not believe they can engage in conflict with their friends and at the same time be in a supportive relationship with them, according to a study by Berndt and Perry (1986). As a result, friendships in middle childhood are often characterised by frequent 'breaking friends' and 'making friends' again. By adolescence the two are seen as compatible. Breaking and making friends are the processes by which the rules of relationships are negotiated. Davies (1982, p68) suggests that they 'serve two important functions, first in terms of the *maintenance of the orderliness* of the children's world and, second, in terms of satisfying their need for exploration and discovery of the dynamics of interpersonal relationships'. So, for example, her field notes of girls' fights (p67) record that 'They seem to be experimenting with interactions to see how much power they have over each other and the boys.... they...have difficulty in *being* a friend because they are not quite sure what it is to be one. Thus they are offensive and hurtful without intending it, and so the conflicts flare up all the time'. Fine makes an analogous point in his discussion of rules (1981, p39):

The rules as a code of conduct are not crucial during late preadolescence. More important is the social experience that derives from learning to manipulate the social order (the use of rules) - the issue

is rights and privileges... It is the process of negotiation that is central to interaction, rather than the formal rules themselves.

Conflicts of this type, which push relationships to their breaking-point, far from being dysfunctional, are functional at this stage of development in terms of the development of psychological insight and social perspective-taking. From a Piagetian perspective, Doise and Palmonari (1984, pp66-7) describe it as a 'socioconstructivist' conception of development:

Social interaction becomes a source of cognitive progress by virtue of the socio-cognitive conflict it engenders. In accordance with a genetic conception of cognitive development we view this development as the elaboration of a more complex structure which reorganizes and coordinates previous regulations. It is precisely the simultaneous confrontation of different individual perspectives or focuses during social interaction that necessitates and gives rise to their integration within a new structure.

Conflict has functions for individual self-development, and it also has functions in terms of the social relationships in which it is embedded and which in turn it serves to produce. Many writers have analysed conflictual and delinquent behaviour in terms of group relations of power and status. Hood and Sparks (quoted in Campbell 1980, p377) conclude that 'All the evidence points to delinquency being mainly the product of the interaction between members of groups. It seems that what is often

important is the significance of the delinquent act for the relationship between members...rather than as an end in itself'. Fine (1981, p46) argues that 'It is a frequent observation that preadolescents can be distressingly cruel to each other, but the social context of this cruelty is not sufficiently emphasized. The cruelty is almost always expressed in the presence of friends. Insults seem to be expressed as much for reasons of self-presentation to one's peers as to attack the target.'

Finally, it should be remembered that arguments are often fun. For instance, children seek ways of making the routine of school enjoyable: one means is arguments. As Sutton-Smith (1982, p74) points out, 'socialisation is not the end of play, but pleasure is'.

## **BULLYING**

Bullying is generally regarded as the most serious form of conflict behaviour among children, involving systematic aggression. A comprehensive review of the burgeoning literature on bullying is beyond the scope of this thesis. But some of the exemplary literature on bullying will be considered in order to illustrate some of the difficulties in analysing conflict among children.

The first major problem with investigating bullying is one of definition. Tattum (1988) proposes a definition which extends from name-calling and teasing to murder. The frequency of bullying will clearly depend upon how it is being defined. For example, Tattum refers to Arora and Thompson's finding that '50 per cent of 14

year olds reported that someone had tried to kick them at least once during the previous week' (p9). (In fact, the accompanying table makes clear that Arora and Thompson's figure applies only to *boys*. Their figure for girls is 14 per cent). But the question that needs to be asked is, what is the *meaning* of kicking in the context of the everyday behaviour of 14 year old boys at school? Kicking is not indicative only of bullying, in fact it may be a common interaction strategy among friends.

Tattum also refers to the finding that the mothers of 26% of 11 year olds stated that their children were being bullied at school. Again the question is, what did these mothers understand and mean by 'bullying'? In the absence of information about both the definitions and the interpretive procedures employed it is impossible to evaluate the findings.

In the same volume Stephenson and Smith address themselves to bullying in the junior school, mainly with reference to the Cleveland Project, which included two studies carried out with final year primary school children. In 1982 in response to a questionnaire teachers stated that they thought 23% of these children were involved in bullying either as bullies or as victims, and that in the majority of cases the bullying had been going on for at least a year. This research raises two questions. Firstly, how reliable are teachers' assessments of bullying? Stephenson and Smith give no information of the interpretive procedures their 49 respondents may have used to recognise bullying. Cohn (1989 p48) points out how widely teachers' perceptions of pupils' behaviour can vary, with reference to racist name-calling: 'one teacher wrote 'paki - not heard for more than a year' while a colleague in the same

school wrote 'paki - the most frequently used name'. In his opening chapter of *Bullying in schools* (1989) Tattum asserts of bullying that 'all who work in education will agree that it is widespread and persistent' (p7). Yet on the following page he draws on the research of Arora and Thompson (1987) into a comprehensive school 'in which the staff did not believe that bullying was a major problem' (p8).

Secondly, how was bullying being defined by the respondents? Again, we are given no information beyond Stephenson and Smith's own definition of bullying as 'a form of social interaction in which a more dominant individual (the bully) exhibits aggressive behaviour which is intended to and does, in fact, cause distress to a less dominant individual (the victim)' (p45). Aggressive behaviour may be verbal or physical. It seems likely that the combination of these two factors, variation in interpretive procedures and variation in the interpretation of the definition, contributed significantly, perhaps largely, to the extraordinarily wide range in the identified frequency of bullying among the schools surveyed. In three schools no bullying at all was identified, whereas in another school over 50% of the year group were said to be involved (p49).

There are two additional problems with Stephenson and Smith's definition. The first concerns the notions of more and less dominant individuals. It appears that these characteristics are ascribed solely on the basis of the children's roles in the aggressive behaviour in question, in which case the notion is tautologous. The second problem concerns the use to which the definition is put. It does not distinguish bullying from the everyday aggressive behaviour of children towards each other. The authors refer on a number of occasions to the persistent character of

bullying, but they state explicitly (p46) that they do not consider this to be a defining characteristic. In any case the degree of persistency is qualified by the 1982 survey finding that 'Approximately 55 per cent of both the bullies and victims were said to be involved in bullying incidents less than once a week' (p48).

In short, it seems questionable whether the 1982 survey can be said to demonstrate anything more than that teachers regarded about one in ten fourth year primary children as being involved in some sort of aggressive behaviour more than once a week. This is not to argue that bullying, defined as something more serious than the everyday aggressive character of much of children's social interaction, does not exist, and may be widespread. What is questionable is the claim that the Cleveland research has reliably distinguished bullying in this way. It is significant that of the teachers who said they had a bullying problem in their class, 91% described it as being of a 'minor' nature (p53).

The research literature on bullying offers a number of explanations of its causes. Roland's (1988) summary of Scandinavian research speaks of explanations but in fact only offers some physiological and psychological *correlations*. Stephenson and Smith, discussing juniors, suggest explanations in terms of home background and school characteristics. The home factors are of two types: problematic family relationships, and social deprivation. What remains to be explained, particularly with the catch-all category of social deprivation, is what are the intervening processes by which these factors *cause* bullying rather than just correlate with it. The evidence shows that bullying is much more frequent in some schools than

others. Assuming that like is being compared with like, it is still not clear if the factors suggested - size of school and of class, school policy on bullying - are *causal* or *facilitative*. For example, do children at schools with a positive stance against bullying do it less because they share the values of the policy or because they do not want to get punished for it? Is there the same difference between schools with and without a policy in terms of *out of school* behaviour?

Chazan (1989, p35-6) suggests that any 'difference' renders a child vulnerable to bullying, but again this does not mean there is a causal relation, as Stephenson and Smith point out. They cite Olweus' conclusion 'that children are not singled out for bullying because they are deviant but that bullies might well latch on to some oddity in a potential victim as a pretext for bullying' (Smith and Stephenson \* p50).

Olweus (1984, p62), discussing his research into 'mobbing', or bullying by groups of children, says 'No support was obtained for the popular notion that external deviations with regard to looks (e.g. fatness, physical handicaps), language (dialect, foreign background), clothing, and so on were of great importance for the appearance of mobbing problems'. But Roland (1988), reviewing Scandinavian research, says that victims of both sexes 'earn significantly lower school grades...and they are also less intelligent'. They are also 'very low on self-esteem', though this may be also the result of being bullied. Stephenson and Smith (1988), discussing bullying in the junior school, say that the majority of victims 'are rated as being passive individuals, as lacking self-confidence and as being unpopular with other children. They are also rated as being physically weaker than the other children'. They also identify a category of 'provocative victims' (17% of all victims) who



'provoke antagonism amongst their peers and actively enjoy aggressive situations'. 'They are rated as being more active, assertive and confident than other victims, as being physically stronger and as being easily provoked' (Stephenson and Smith 1988, p52. A more detailed description of the same categories can be found in Besag 1989, pp13-21). Besag (1989, pp44-5) refers to Goffman's notion of social templates but says 'It is not yet clear whether bullying children seek out those who have a 'stigma'... I suspect the victim is chosen for reasons other than obvious physical features but, once identified, the red hair or glasses become easy targets for provocation and harassment'.

That still leaves the question of an explanation in terms of the causes of the bullies' behaviour, rather than their choice of victim. Besag (1989, pp33-40) discusses a number of possible explanations of bullying:

- Lack of social knowledge

It has been suggested that bullies are at a lower level of moral development, including a lack of perspective-taking, and therefore they don't realise the hurt they are causing. This may be true of some younger children, but it clearly is not true of most bullying. They do it precisely because they recognise that it hurts.

- Lack of social competence

Either lack of self-control, or a restricted repertoire of behaviours, reinforced by previous experiences of 'successful' aggressive behaviour.

- Pleasure

Besag does not deal with this as an explanation, but she does refer to 'the fun of an attack', and it needs to be given more emphasis as a factor. For many children, aggressive behaviour, verbal or physical, is *fun*, especially in the routine of school. This is confirmed by studies of older males (e.g. see below Willis 1977, Dunning et al 1988).

- Working class culture

It is suggested that working class culture places a premium on the values of aggression, particularly for males. Willis speaks of 'having a laff' as a guiding principle of the working-class 'lads' deviant behaviour in his study (1977, pp33-6). Dunning et al (1988, p220), in a study of football hooliganism, say that 'For many lower-working-class males in particular contexts, fighting, aggressive confrontations and vandalism involve not only character contests and the expression of frustration and resentment but also the arousal of pleasurable excitement'.

- Gender cultures

Besag suggests that 'boys seek power and dominance, whereas girls need a sense of affirmation and affiliation, a feeling of belonging and a shared intimacy' (p40), and that these may give rise to different patterns of bullying. Askew (1988) sees bullying as part of a continuum of aggressive behaviour which society encourages in boys. This is a causal explanation, for which the mechanisms can be identified, but it clearly is not a complete explanation, since it does not explain why some girls bully and why some boys are opposed to bullying.

• Parenting practices

Besag refers to the work of Olweus, a leading figure in Scandinavian research on bullying. He suggests two types of causal factors for bullying, one of which concerns the relationship between certain parenting styles and the creation of an aggressive personality pattern which persists as a relatively stable motive system over time (1978 pp136-7, p158). He finds a strong correlation between boys who bully and the behaviour and attitudes of parents, especially the mother. 'Negative attitudes towards the boy, and the use of power-assertive discipline, are strongly correlated with the child's aggressiveness at school' (1984, p2). There is also a third factor: 'it would seem that a generally lax, undemanding or inconsistent upbringing markedly impedes the building up of internal aggression-controlling mechanisms' (Olweus 1978 p161).

Olweus also discusses the role of peer relationships. His second area of causation is the 'group climate' in the class. Olweus examined both peer relations and teacher-pupil relations as components of group climate and concludes that 'The relations with the teacher and to schoolwork seemed to be of minor significance, both for these interpersonal relations and for the appearance and the degree of whipping boy/bully problems in a class' (1978 p77). 'The results suggest that the peer group functioned to a considerable extent as a 'closed system' with its own forms of interaction' (p75). What was significant was the 'degree of tension and conflict between the boys in the class' (p65), as measured by the correlation of bullying with two peer-rated indices, 'Start Fights' and 'Tease' (p72). One important finding is that

it appears that an aggressive boy is in many situations rewarded for his aggressiveness, in the form of prestige, as well as with more concrete benefits (e.g., Bandura 1973). The study by Patterson et al. (1967) showed, for example, that not less than 80% of aggressive acts in nursery school led to favourable consequences for the aggressive child. The reactions of peers can thus be assumed to strengthen (or possibly to reduce, or modify in other ways) an aggressive reaction pattern in a boy. (pp161-2)

Olweus' quantitative methodology limits the ability to explore these forms of interaction. As he says in his chapter on method, he focused on 'information or data that fulfill the criteria of being both *relevant* and *quantifiable*' (p21). Symptomatically, there are virtually no direct quotations from any of the boys studied presented in the book.

One further type of causal explanation needs to be mentioned: genetic explanations of aggressive behaviour. Olweus' conclusion is as follows (1978, p159):

It must be immediately admitted that, at present, very little is known about the potential influence of genetic factors as a basis for individual differences in habitual aggression levels in humans (among boys). [...] In sum, although more definite conclusions cannot be drawn due to a paucity of research findings, it may be tentatively assumed that

individual differences in aggression level among boys are only to a rather small extent (if at all) determined by genetic factors....

## **ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDIES OF CONFLICT**

A major problem with some of the literature on bullying is that it abstracts it from the wider context of conflict among children. A related problem, which it shares with much of the literature on conflict from child social psychology that has been referred to, is that it pays little attention to the ways in which conflict among children is influenced and shaped by wider social processes and structures. The worlds of children are suffused by relations of power. Children stand in a relation of subordinacy to the structural and ideological impositions of the adult world, particularly the home and the school. This section will examine the relations of power and status that exist between children in this context by drawing on a number of studies most of which belong to a British tradition of ethnographic studies of children in school.

Many writers have pointed to a hierarchy of power relations among children. Pollard (1985, p49) notes that status is competed for, and refers to the Opies' (1959) documenting of 'chants and procedures by which a pecking order is established within the playground'. This culture of aggressive competitiveness is most overt among boys. Askew and Ross (1988, p34) state

We observed a 'continuous power play' underlying most interactions between boys, an ongoing process of positioning and a continual seeking of status and prestige.

In many classrooms of eleven- and twelve-year-old boys there was continual competitive interaction between many of the boys. This could relate to their work, skill, dress, behaviour or activities, feats or fights outside the classroom. Boys seemed to be constantly attempting to impress each other through various antics in the classroom (which might involve provocative behaviour or rudeness towards the teacher) or generally 'winding' each other up, resulting in physical violence from time to time.

Askew and Ross observed girls also competing for esteem on the basis of 'femininity', but the ideology of femininity includes themes of caring in a way that the ideology of masculinity does not. (Schofield, 1981, makes the same point).

One of these domains of competitiveness is physicality, particularly in the case of boys. Sluckin (1981, p11) studied a middle school where 'the boys from very early on continually discussed who could beat up whom'. Schofield, in her study of American 12 and 13 year olds (1981, p65) noted that

Athletics and other forms of physical interaction are more than just play. Boys often use such interactions to compete with each other for highly

valued places at the top of the male dominance hierarchy, which they rather systematically set about constructing.... Girls were rarely observed engaged in such efforts to establish a dominance hierarchy based on physical prowess.

This echoes Willis's (1977, p35) comment on the social meaning of violence in the lads' culture: 'It marks the last move in, and final validation of, the informal status system'. The subcultural hierarchy in the domain of physicality can of course be exploited, legitimised and reinforced by the school's official negotiated order: as in the sports hierarchy in Walker's (1988) study of Stokeham High (see p64), or the disciplinary regime at Beynon's 'school for men' (1989).

Associated with physicality is the use of space as an expression of power. Clarricoates (1987, p197) argues that 'Domination of space within schools operates as an expression and mechanism of social control. This is imposed by 'dominant' groups...'. Clarricoates studied the dominance of space by boys as a component of their dominance over girls (see also Askew and Ross 1988, p21 and White 1988). For Walker's footballers, the use of sport to dominate the play area was a significant instrument and expression of their status. (Walker makes the analogy with the claim to territory in the locality, p47. On territoriality, see Hewitt 1986, pp25,28, and Hall et al 1976, p43).

Children's games are another domain of power-relations, as Sutton-Smith notes (quoted in Sluckin 1981, p111):

In the children's game we find a distillation of human relationships, particularly those having to do with power.... They are models of ways of succeeding over others, by magical power (as in games of chance), by force (as in physical skill games), or by cleverness (as in games of strategy). We have speculated that in games children learn all those necessary arts of trickery, deception, harassment, divination and foul play that their teachers won't teach them but are most important in successful human relationships in marriage, business and war.

Another dimension of power-relations is humour at the expense of others. Pollard (1985, p48) refers to the Opies' collection of children's 'nicknames, jeers, torments and tricks' used to exclude other children. Clarricoates (1987, p198), speaking of boys' behaviour, notes how 'Verbal practice which included jokes and even threats were constantly made as a way of gaining space from the girls'. Walker (1988, p53) notes the footballers' habitual use of aggressive and competitive humour. Willis makes a similar point, referring to the 'lads': 'The soul of wit for them is disparaging relevance: the persistent searching out of weakness' (1977, p32. See also Woods 1983, pp100-1).

The academic domain of school can also be an arena of, and a contributing factor towards, power-relations between pupils. Clarricoates, for example, (1987, pp193-4) describes how at Applegate school 'Academic aspirations were part and parcel of the value structure of both school and home... Both girls and boys regarded



scholastic ability as an indicator of high status... At Applegate, the boys each sought academic achievement for the sake of their own individual status.'

## MANAGING CONFLICT

Children are not simply at the mercy of conflict, they actively seek to manage it. Rubin (1980) sees the ability to manage conflict successfully, based on sensitivity to others' rights and feelings, as one of the skills of friendship. The principle of equality supplies the criterion by which such acts are critically judged: children disapprove of peers who violate equality by misusing their position of advantage, actual or claimed (Youniss 1980). Conflict can be dealt with negatively or positively. Youniss uses the term 'negative chaining' to describe sequences of offences and retaliation. Positive resolution requires one of the actors to refrain from retaliation and avoid confrontation (see Sluckin 1981, pp37ff for examples). Conflict between friends is frequent, but is seen as the breakdown of a norm, and is understood as flowing from differences in individual psychological states (p230). Cooperation, and therefore the resolution of conflict, requires equality of treatment. Older children regarded it as unkind of peers to recognise an inequality and not to act to rectify it (p214).

Cairns and Cairns (1986) identify two key concepts in empirical studies of conflict situations: reciprocity and escalation (i.e. 'tit for tat', and intensification). Their overview of research evidence shows that most potential conflicts do not escalate. Social mechanisms for handling them include deception and concealment, mutual

recognition and acceptance of a dominance hierarchy, and non-reciprocal responses, such as turning the other cheek or pretending not to notice the offence. Cairns and Cairns' focus is on adolescence, but there is evidence of children in middle childhood adopting the same strategies. For example, Sluckin (1981) identifies a number of such strategies: impose a solution, leave, fight, redefine the situation, redefine the individual, redefine the act. Katz, Kramer and Gottman (1992) also offer examples of conflict management strategies: referring to a rule to resolve the argument; giving a reason for the disagreement; making an offer or compromise; exploring the feelings of the child who was upset; using a weakened form of the demand that permits face-saving; making a humorous or self-deprecating statement. Of course, as Ross and Conant (1992) point out, there are limits to the efficacy of conflict resolution. While ideally conflict should end in compromise, it seems that this is rarely to the satisfaction of all parties to it. Arguments over control of behaviour or exclusions can easily lead to clear winner-loser outcomes.

Selman (1980, 1981), in an analysis of processes of conflict resolution, suggests a developmental pattern in which children develop from physicalistic and momentary conceptions to mutual and language-based ones. On the basis of a progression in perspective-taking, he proposes a progression in Interpersonal Negotiation Strategies, which have two dimensions:

1. developmental:

cognitive - understanding of self and others

emotional - managing disequilibrium in conflict situations

motivational - ie the primary goal of the strategy, which range from lower level:

short term, material, egocentric, to higher level: long term positive relationships,  
mutual satisfaction

2. Interpersonal orientation: three modes of social control:

other-transforming

self-transforming

collaborative

Selman sees development in terms of a shift from a rigid application of other-transforming and self-transforming strategies to a collaborative mode of social management. Empirical confirmation is furnished by case-studies of two pairs of children (Selman and Schultz 1989). The ability of two six year old boys to offer and accept regulation, integrating 'other-transforming and self-transforming orientations within one context for negotiation' (p393), is contrasted with that of two girls, locked in a spiral of escalating power struggle.

One further category of conflict management concerns unfavourable remarks made about an absent third party - what Gottman and Parker (1989) refer to as 'negative evaluation gossip', and regard as a key social process of middle childhood. Cairns and Cairns (1986) develop this point in their discussion of antisocial behaviour among adolescents, but their argument can also be applied to children approaching adolescence.

Such social mechanisms might take the form of interactional strategies which permit hurtful actions but simultaneously diminish the likelihood

of escalation by concealment of the act or the actor by deception. The more cognitively advanced the persons in the relationship, the greater should be the likelihood of such concealment, deception, and indirection.

Accordingly, the "mature" strategies for interpersonal control and coercion observed in adolescence should be expanded beyond childhood to include deception and concealment. For instance, defamation of another person's reputation by rumor and gossip should be a particularly useful aggressive strategy for adolescents in the short-run. The long-term danger is that precisely the same strategy will be employed in return. "Loyalty" and "trust" thus become especially salient qualities of friendship and relationships, assuming greater importance as socially mediated and "hidden" forms of personal attack become extensively employed. Additional interpersonal strategies that diminish the likelihood of aggressive escalation might be expected to emerge in adolescence. These would include the explicit definition of roles within the social structure so that the dominance or priority of persons or actions becomes mutually recognized and accepted. (pp326-7).

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has focused on the central role that conflict occupies in children's relationships and development. It has situated the psychological dynamics of

conflict within the social processes of childhood peer cultures, and identified both the principal forms in which it manifests itself and the ways in which children attempt to manage it.

## CHAPTER 3

### SOCIOLOGY AND CHILDREN'S CULTURES

In the Introduction the undeveloped state of the sociology of childhood was noted, in contrast to the body of work that has been produced by social psychologists. Nevertheless, there are several strands of sociological research relevant to the study of children's cultures. There are a small number of ethnographic studies of childhood itself, there is a rich body of work on 'pupil cultures', and there is also an important area of research into 'youth cultures'. In this chapter the theoretical perspectives that inform these areas of research are critically assessed, and the theoretical framework within which my own research is situated is elaborated.

Davies' (1982) definition of the culture of childhood provides a useful starting point:

Even without the rights enjoyed by adults, and despite the expectations placed on them as members of the institution of childhood, children busily get on with the business of constructing their own reality with each other, as well as making sense of and developing strategies to cope with the adult world as and when it impinges on their world. This reality and its related strategies I refer to as the culture of childhood. (p33)

Davies' study, in an Australian context, together with those by Sluckin (1981) in Britain and Fine (1987) and Thorne (1993) in the United States, are among the few sociological studies focusing on children's cultures that are comparable to the studies of 'youth cultures' among teenagers. There is however one substantial body of work on children within a sociological perspective, and that is the largely British tradition of research into pupil cultures that begins with Hargreaves (1967) and Lacey (1967) in the secondary school context and Nash's (1973) primary school research. A number of studies of children in primary schools followed, of which probably the best known is Pollard (1985). An important group of studies focused particularly on gender issues in relation to pupil cultures (see, for example, Holly 1985; Lees 1986; Mahony 1985; Sharpe 1976; Wolpe 1988), some of them in the primary school context (e.g. Askew and Ross 1988; Clarricoates 1987).

The principal focus of these studies is on the cultures of children in relation to the official culture of the school, in other words on the pupil rather than the whole child. But children's cultures are not confined to the academic context, and it is not the case that their centres of gravity necessarily lie there. School is only one social site of children's cultures, though it is of course a key one. In school, breaktimes take up a significant proportion of the school day. The importance of life in the playground has been recognised in a number of studies (Sluckin 1981; White 1988; Hart 1993; Blatchford and Sharp 1994). During the rest of the day, every interstice between lessons - moving from one room to another, going to the toilet, getting changed for games or PE, doing classroom jobs, changing tasks - is a site where children's cultures thrive. And even during lesson-time, much of children's social interaction is

not primarily governed by the 'learner context'. It is not so much a case of disruptive behaviour which derives its significance precisely from the fact that it challenges the academic regime, and in that sense can be defined negatively in terms of the 'learner context', but rather of the currents of social interaction that flow through every lesson, running parallel to the official discourse, but often unconnected to it. There is ample opportunity for this in the primary classroom, in which for much of the time the children are working on their own or in groups, often some distance from the teacher. In these ways the informal culture of children - all children, not just the 'nonconformists' - flows throughout the school day, sometimes spilling over into conflict with authority, but mostly coexisting with it. Its existence in lesson-time is often tolerated as part of the 'working consensus' (Pollard 1985) that teachers and children tacitly negotiate, though teachers may well have only a limited awareness of the content of these informal cultural practices.

Nevertheless, although work on pupil cultures has tended to neglect those aspects of children's cultures which do not directly engage with the official culture of the school, it has made a major contribution to the sociological study of children's cultures, both substantively, in terms of the light it has shed on micro-social processes and structures, and theoretically, in that it has been instrumental in establishing an influential alternative paradigm, that of interpretive sociology, to that of the empirical tradition within British sociology of education of the 1950s and 1960s.



## SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM

In one of the most influential recent publications dealing with children and schools, Pollard (1987) refers to the particular significance of symbolic interactionist theory and ethnographic methods in this field, because they 'treat the behaviour of people as being meaningful forms of action - and focus, *as the first essential for any analysis* [my emphasis], on understanding the perspectives of the people who are involved in a particular social situation' (p3. See also Fine 1981). Symbolic interactionism has been very fruitful in generating studies of classroom processes and the meanings of participants, in contrast both to structural-functionalism with its emphasis on the school as the site of passive socialisation into societal norms, and to structuralist Marxism's notion of education as reproduction. Its focus is, in Schutz's words (quoted in Hall 1977, p20) 'the structure of the commonsense world of everyday life' which is constructed out of intersubjective meanings.

The major contribution of symbolic interactionist approaches to increasing our understanding of social processes within schools is evident. The problem with this sociological tradition is its inability to account adequately for the relationship of consciousness to social structure beyond the micro-situation. Indeed, for some symbolic interactionists the totality of social structure is nothing more than the aggregate of micro-situations. (See Hall 1977, pp19-21, for a critique of Schutz in this respect). With regard to school, what are the relationships between the micro-situations of pupil interaction and their expressed meanings, and the wider society?

The conception of the relationship of the individual and society in symbolic interactionism has been most explicitly addressed within education by Woods (1983, p2). For him, it is 'the important concept of 'the generalized other' which makes the conceptual link between individual behaviour and society'. Children's development is marked by an increasing ability to 'take the role of the other'. That process becomes generalised so that one 'sees oneself in terms of generalized and abstracted norms, values and beliefs', and thus 'it is through the generalized other that the community exercises influence over the individual through his very thought processes'. There are themes here that echo those identified earlier in the social psychology of childhood. Their origin of course lies in Mead.

There are three distinguishing features of this conception of the individual/society relationship that deserve comment. First, the absence of any notion of social structure. The social order is conceived of in ideological terms, essentially as a set of norms. Secondly, the consensual nature of the social order. Thirdly, the determinist character of the society/individual relationship.

In relation to the first two points, Peter Leonard argues that symbolic interactionism 'totally lacks an effective theorisation of the social order... [and] an analysis of class and gender relations, of ideology and of other features of the capitalist mode of production' (Leonard 1984, p73). Mead himself saw society as essentially rational and consensual, culturally diverse but not structurally contradictory. He was one of the key figures (along with James and Dewey) in 'Pragmatism', a practical philosophical movement orientated towards evolutionary democratic social change.

Human behaviour was adaptive, creative, problem-solving - pragmatic. Social change was to be accomplished through cultural socialisation, especially through education, while retaining existing class and institutional arrangements. The internalisation of the social through the 'me', controlling the 'I' of impulse, created the social self. Through taking the role of the other and establishing a shared reciprocity of perspectives, social understanding and therefore social harmony was enhanced. C W Mills described symbolic interactionism as 'a social psychology for liberals' (quoted in Roberts 1978, p85).

When this approach is applied to the analysis of education in contemporary Britain, it encounters a problem. Education seems to be riven by conflicts which are rooted in the social structure itself. Symbolic interactionists tend to respond either by marginalising them or by importing concepts and analyses of social structure from other theoretical paradigms but without integrating them with their symbolic interactionist framework. Andy Hargreaves identifies a 'split-level model' of the relation between school and society as common in interactionist studies of education (1980, p189). In spite of its title, *The Sociology of the School*, Woods' (1983) book focuses almost exclusively on the school in isolation from the wider society. The way he deals, very briefly, with social class in relation to pupil culture is revealing (pp84-6). He relies on references to two studies, by Willis (1977) and Corrigan (1979). But what is distinctive about these two studies is that they are written within a marxist, not a symbolic interactionist, perspective. When Woods quotes Corrigan talking about 'material conditions of existence' or 'the repressive power of the state' he is introducing the vocabulary of an entirely different discourse, that is not

integrated into the symbolic interactionist perspective he is working within, and indeed features nowhere else in the book.

Similarly, Pollard's (1985) book contains a section on 'Primary Schools and Society' which discusses society in terms of 'state capitalism' and 'hegemony'. He speaks of 'a continuous dialectical movement between the macro and micro levels in which the social and economic structure and individuals together generate and regenerate the hegemony' (pp107-8) and of resistance to hegemony: 'attempts to penetrate the existing social order and to build a new one can originate at any scale - even in a classroom, staffroom or playground - and it is arguable that some of the teacher and child perspectives which have been discussed in previous chapters could be seen in this way' (p112). But he does not explore this argument elsewhere in the book, and his key concepts of 'interests-at hand' and 'coping strategies' derive from a quite different discourse and are limited to addressing the pragmatics of the immediate situation. The 'social context' is present, but only as a backdrop to the real action, face-to-face interaction. The material and ideological processes through which they constitute each other remain outside the analytic framework within which Woods and Pollard work. It is this failure to deploy a set of concepts which can theorise the macro level, inherent in symbolic interactionism because of the analytic primacy it gives to face-to-face interaction, that will paralyse any attempt to realize Hammersley's proposal (Hammersley, 1980, p205) for interactionism as a basis for macro analysis.

The third feature of symbolic interactionism is its normative determinism. How does it square with the claim of symbolic interactionists that, in Woods' words, 'Human beings...are the constructors of their own actions' (1983, p3). It can only do this by defining the sphere of active behaviour very narrowly. This is clearly illustrated by Woods' description of the typical symbolic interactionist actor which begins his chapter on pupil strategies (1980, p11).

A perplexed, somewhat anguished, yet essentially well-intentioned character groping his way among alternatives, most of which are given to him by the world and some more nearly of his own making.

He continues:

This particular image of person as copier, manager, dramatiser, rationalising his way through means to ends, adjusting behaviour according to situations and contingencies, continually monitoring the process of action, checking and re-casting his own thoughts and intentions in line with changing possibilities and expectations, in short, as a deviser of strategies, is basic to interactionist approaches, and particularly apt for the study of largely conflictual situations like schools.

That, perhaps, is not a bad recipe for education in modern industrial society, that is learning to accommodate to a variety of roles in a flexible

way, with maximum command but personally adjustable commitment.

In his ability to change readily according to the situation, the perplexed copier, when he is winning, becomes protean man (Woods 1980, p12)

The freedom here lies not in the ability to construct social roles - on the contrary the emphasis is on accommodation to them - but on 'personally adjustable commitment' - the ability of the actor to distance himself or herself from the role. Woods draws here on the development of the dramaturgical metaphor by Erving Goffman in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959). His central concept of 'impression management' has been very influential in interactionist analyses of childhood. It is the governing concept, for example, of Gary Fine's study of preadolescent boys in the United States. (See Woods 1983, pp4-6). But as Gouldner argues,

A dramaturgical model is an accommodation congenial only to those who are willing to accept the basic allocations of existent master institutions... It is for those whom have already made it out in the big game...those members of the middle class who generally mask their alienation out of a concern to maintain a respectable appearance (quoted in Smart 1971, p336).

The functionalist character of interactionist analyses of school is brought out clearly in Pollard's work. As he says of his *The Social World of the primary School* (1985) 'Adaptations are, in a sense, the main subject of the book' (1985, p3), and 'coping strategy' is the key concept. 'Teachers and children adapt to their classroom life

together and their social strategies often mesh to produce sets of stable, routine practices which are understood and used to 'cope' with the situation' (p6).

### **A FOUCAULTIAN PERSPECTIVE**

Perhaps one of the best-known attempts to develop an approach to the individual-society relationship in education outside the tradition of symbolic interactionism is the work of Valerie Walkerdine, who has used Foucault's theory of power in the formation of the individual to analyse processes in schools.

What we need to understand is how that condition which we call individuality is formed within apparatuses of social regulation, including education. (1983, p87)

I have sited the psychology/pedagogy couple within a set of administrative apparatuses of regulation through normalisation. In this sense, then, I have argued that such practices produce children as subjects. (1984, p188)

Walkerdine argues that individuals are subject to the appeals of many competing discourses offering a range of possible subject-positions. For school pupils, the discourses of education, in the form of ideologies of normalisation (i.e. of what is 'naturally' normal/good/right), perform regulatory functions which confront children with 'the negotiation of an impossible array of identifications' (1985, p225). How

successful are these processes of regulation? Walkerdine recognises that there is only a partial fit between dominant forms of power and the formation of the individual, but she rejects the possibility of successful *contestation* of those regulative processes.

In stressing the productive potential of the power/knowledge relations of schooling and the multiplicity of positions for children to enter, the issue is now the relationship between those positions and the effectivity of their content... This does not mean that they will be effective, but it does mean that difference becomes pathologised. (1985, p228)

Walkerdine's work is peopled by images of the pathologised child: 'within our present system of schooling, the success of working-class children and girls depends upon the effectivity of disavowal and therefore upon intense and persecutory pain experienced by such children' (1985, p225). What is open to question is the one-dimensionality of Walkerdine's analysis, which leaves no space for *contestation*, or even for 'alternative space', only for pathologised marginalisation (Jones \*). One significant absence from her analysis is the role of the peer-group and of the subcultures of children and young people in enabling them to collectively make some social space of their own within which to partially resist the normalising processes of school (and family) and create their own subject-positions, albeit within the regulatory context of the school.

#### YOUTH STUDIES



A perspective on children's cultures which goes beyond the limitations which noted in both the symbolic interactionist and Foucaultian perspectives can be developed from work in the field of cultural studies, and in particular to that tradition originating in the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. A starting point is provided by Pollard's (1985) characterisation of children's cultures:

In child culture, then, we have a social phenomenon which orients itself in two directions at once. Looking externally, it develops within the adult-directed structures of the school and community, and it offers children a source of support, security and positive esteem which is to a great extent insulated from the often threatening experience of teacher-dominated classroom processes or of parental strictures. It is developed largely from the children's territory of the playground while the grown-ups drink their coffee. It also offers a means of defining and reinterpreting the meaning and relevance of the contradictions, dilemmas and expectations which impinge on children because of their structural position. Thus within children's friendship groups commonsense knowledge, shared values and collective strategies will be developed to cope with the world of adults. On the other hand, if we look internally, child culture acts rather differently to provide norms, constraints and expectations which bear on its members. Thus although it is enabling in one respect, it is constraining in another, and we have seen that the social system of children is itself structured and represents

a context in which children seek to establish their competence and a positive identity. (pp49-50)

Pollard captures here the key elements of children's culture, but he makes a false counterposition between looking outwards at the relationship of children's culture to the adult world and looking inwards at children's relationships and identities. The crucial point about children's cultures is how personal relationships and identities are made in the all-pervasive force-field of the power relations of the dominant culture, as mediated particularly by home and school. That is not to say that children's cultures can simply be read off as the product of the dominant cultures. On the contrary, there is a need to stress the dimension of creativity and contestation. But it is equally necessary to recognise that every manifestation of children's culture is coloured and shaped by the dominant culture, even in its partial rejection of it. Willis (1977, p62) makes this point in defining his concept of 'differentiation' as 'The particular process by which working class culture creatively manifests itself as a concrete form within, and separates itself from *even as it is influenced by the* particular institution I shall call *differentiation*' [emphasis added]. A similar idea is embodied in Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus'. According to Harvey (1989), Bourdieu

explains how a 'matrix of perceptions, appreciations and actions' can at one and the same time be put to work flexibly to 'achieve infinitely diversified tasks' while at the same time being 'in the last instance' (Engels' famous phrase) engendered out of the material experience of 'objective structures'...[...] The mediating link is provided by the concept

of 'habitus', a 'durably installed generative principle of regulated improvisations' which in turn tend to reproduce the objective conditions which produced the generative principle in the first place. (p219)

Children are active makers of social reality, but they do so in situations largely not of their own choosing, because of their relative powerlessness, and with limited sets of choices in terms of the cultural repertoires available to them to draw on. In Bourdieu's words,

Because the habitus is an endless capacity to engender products - thoughts, perceptions, expressions, actions - whose limits are set by the historically and socially situated conditions of its production, the conditioning and conditional freedom it secures is as remote from a creation of unpredictable novelty as it is from a simple, mechanical reproduction of the initial conditionings. (1977, p95, quoted in Harvey 1989, p219)

Clarke et al (1976, p11) speak of 'a pre-constituted 'field of the possibles' which groups take up, transform, develop'. The importance of the group is well recognised within youth cultural studies. For example, Willis regards the informal group as the key social unit of the counter-culture (1977, p23, pp123-4). 'The 'culture' of a group or class is the peculiar and distinctive 'way of life' of the group or class, the meanings, values and ideas embodied in institutions, in social relations, in systems

of belief, in *mores* and customs, in the uses of objects and material life' (Clarke et al. 1976, p 10). Cultures are heterogeneous, and give rise to sub-cultures. Cultures are articulated to the class structure and stand in relations of power to each other.

In 'Subcultures, Cultures and Class' (1976) Clarke et al. offer a detailed definition of youth sub-cultures as sets of strategies through which sections of youth negotiate their collective existence (see pp45, 47), comprising 'concerns, activities, relationships, materials [which] become embodied in rituals of relationship, occasion and movement'. They...are concrete, identifiable social formations constructed as a collective response to the material and situated experience of their class'. 'It is at the intersection between the located parent culture [i.e. working class or middle class cultures] and the mediating institutions of the dominant culture that youth sub-cultures arise. Many forms of adaptation, negotiation and resistance, elaborated by the 'parent' culture in its encounter with the dominant culture, are borrowed and adapted by the youth in *their* encounter with the mediating institutions of provision and control....But there are also 'focal concerns' more immediate, conjunctural, specific to 'youth' and its situations and activities' (p 53).

Clarke et al. do not deal specifically with children and young people at school, but the passages quoted above could have been written with school in mind (see Corrigan 1979). Child sub-cultures arise out of the encounter between specific parent class cultures, in which the culture of the home is embedded, and the hegemonising institution of the school (and also of commercial mass child culture, mainly television). Within them children create and enact relations of power and

dependence, friendship and conflict, relations between the genders, relations to school knowledge and authority. The particular value of the cultural studies perspective is that it allows us to connect these to themes and structures of the wider society within one coherent theoretical framework. Willis summarises it in the following way:

At the broadest level I see the cultural studies project as a particular kind of interest in a particular 'moment' of the most general social processes. These are the social processes through which people collectively produce themselves in their production of social and material life. This production is always in relation to a particular dominant, structured, Mode of Production, and is conducted through antagonistic and structured social relations - not least for the working class through an antagonistic, though also reproductive, relation to prevailing cultures and dominant ideological practices. Briefly, the 'cultural moment' in all this concerns the specifically human and collective activity of *meaning making* - the making sense, if you will, of a structural location: a position in a social relationship and Mode of Production. (1983, p\*)

The CCCS writers' work on youth subcultures provides the most useful basis to approach children's subcultures, though they themselves do not focus on children and school. However, in this study the concept of subculture as applied to children will be used in a slightly different way from how the CCCS writers use it. First, they use the term to apply to tight, distinctive and minority cultural forms, often of an

alternative or oppositional character, which they distinguish from the 'everyday life' of youth (see Clarke et al 1976, pp14,16). In this study, the concept of children's subcultures in schools is used to apply to the distinct cultural repertoires that *all* children employ (though differentially of course).

Secondly, some of the writers within the 'cultural studies' tradition tend to place the main emphasis on the ideological level. Subcultures tend to be seen as an attempt to solve the problems that subordinate social groups, face but at the ideological level, i.e. symbolically or 'magically'. The discussion by Clarke and his colleagues of Philip Cohen's work is particularly relevant here (Clarke et al 1976, p33). They suggest that 'By concentrating on the imaginary, ideological relation in which sub-cultures stand to the life of the class, the analysis may now have gone too far in the direction of reading sub-cultures 'ideologically'. Not enough account is perhaps taken of the material, economic and social conditions specific to the 'sub-cultural solution'. Children's subcultures arise as ways to deal with the situations they encounter not primarily ideologically but *practically*.

The practical problem-solving character of children's subcultures is emphasised by a writer outside the CCCS cultural studies tradition, Jim Walker, in his study of young men at an Australian high school (1988, pp34-35). It is interesting to compare his concept of sub-cultures with Pollard's key concept of 'coping strategies' (e.g. 1985, pp150-6). Where they differ is that the concept of coping strategies is defined in terms of pragmatic response to immediate situational factors (even though it may be routinised). Woods (1980, p42) makes this clear: 'the actions of pupils in relation to

moment-to-moment changes in their situation must be a central element in any model of their activity. Indeed, this level has a certain priority'. Walker's concept of culture as problem-solving, while not neglecting immediate situational factors, is not reducible to a pragmatic response to them. Cultures 'include dispositions to pursue *goals*, and to deploy or devise *means* for seeking these ends. The patterns of means and ends, and the priorities among them, reflect the *values* of the culture' (Walker 1988, p32). Walker gives the example of some of the Greek high school students, for whom acquiring money was a means to relatively long-term ends such as building a business. It is impossible to explain this sort of behaviour in terms of Pollard's category of 'primary interests-at-hand', i.e. self-image, enjoyment, control of stress, retention of dignity. In fact these may often conflict with each other and on occasion conflict with, and be subordinated to, longer-term purposes.

Walker's concept of culture is superior to Pollard's in one other respect. Walker relates the behavioural elements of a culture to a cognitive framework, which is 'the group's view of the world and its own particular place in the world. People, that is to say, always act in accordance with a particular view of the world. This will include all sorts of elements, such as a set of beliefs about human behaviour, a moral code, and a political 'line'. It may not be an entirely consistent or explicit view, but it informs their actions nonetheless' (Walker 1988, p32).

This aspect of culture can be developed by drawing on Goran Therborn's (1980) work on ideology and subjectivity.

A person acts out, lives his/her personality as a subject, in different forms of subjectivity, which nevertheless do not exhaust it. Under certain conditions the two may even come into tension or conflict. The forms of human subjectivity are constituted by intersections of the psychic and the social, and may be seen as the outer, more conscious and more socially changeable aspects of the person. (p16)

Basing himself on Gramsci and Althusser, Therborn develops a conception of how subjectivities are shaped by ideologies:

the conception of ideology employed here deliberately includes both everyday notions and 'experience' and elaborate intellectual doctrines, both the 'consciousness' of social actors and the institutionalized thought-systems and discourses of a given society. But to study these as ideology means to look at them from a particular perspective: not as bodies of thought or structures of discourse *per se*, but as manifestations of a particular being-in-the-world of conscious actors, of human subjects. In other words, to conceive of a text or an utterance as ideology is to focus on the way it operates in the formation and transformation of human subjectivity. (p2)

Therborn wants to see 'ideologies, not as possessions, as ideas possessed, but as *social processes*. That is, to see them as complex social processes of 'interpellation' or address, speaking to us. In these continuous processes ideologies overlap,



compete and clash, drown or reinforce each other' (p vii). He identifies three fundamental modes of ideological interpellation: ideologies tell people what exists, what is good, and what is possible (p18). These correspond closely to Walker's conception (above) of the cognitive dimension of culture. The force of ideologies however is determined not at the level of discourse but at the level of concrete experience. 'All ideologies operate in a material matrix of affirmations and sanctions, and this matrix determines their interrelationships' (p33). With regard to the formation of subjectivity, 'ideological interpellations unceasingly constitute and reconstitute who we are. A single human being may act as an almost unlimited number of subjects... Ideologies differ, compete and clash not only in what they say about the world we inhabit, but also in telling us who we are, in the kind of subject they interpellate. And these different interpellations of what exists are usually connected with different interpellations of what is right and what is possible for such a subject' (p78).

This Gramscian conception of ideology will be revisited in the next chapter. But first, it is important to deal with one other vital contribution that sociology has made to the understanding of children's cultures, and that is in the area of gender.

## **GENDER AND CHILDREN'S CULTURES**

There are a number of important studies of gender and children's culture (see, for example, Askew and Ross 1988; Clarricoates 1987; Davies 1982; Holly 1985; Lees 1986; Mahony 1985; Sharpe 1976; Wolpe 1988; Thorne 1993). These stand at the

confluence of two major fields of social research - feminist cultural studies and classroom ethnography. A number of more general studies of the ethnography of primary classrooms have also shed light on gender issues (for example, Hammersley and Woods 1984; Measor and Woods 1984; Pollard 1985, 1987).

One of the most fully documented features of children's cultures is sex-segregation. Davey and Mullin (1982) report that only 1.8% of some 4000 primary school children in their study made cross-gender friendship choices. Denscombe (1983) found that all the children in his primary school research chose friends of the same sex as themselves. Abrams (1989) asserts that among 11-year old children, friendship is same-sex. Measor and Woods (1984) found only same-sex friendship groups in their study of first-year secondary school children. The picture given by American research is the same. In a review of research, confirmed by her own research study, Hallinan (1980) reports that friendship is almost exclusively same-sex.

Barrie Thome (1986, 1993) criticises this 'two worlds' model because, although it has generated many important insights, it 'has eclipsed full, contextual understanding of gender and social relations among children' (1986, p168). It exaggerates differences and neglects similarities, it tends to assume boys and girls have unitary and dichotomous collective identities, and it abstracts gender from its social context, and in particular from relations of power.

Our understanding of relationships between girls and boys has been greatly advanced by a series of ethnographic studies of British schools. Their focus has been on the social power exercised by boys over girls. There is however a tendency to reduce the complexity of cross-gender relationships to ones of unilaterally oppressive relations between two static and unitary gender categories. In his book *Gender and Power* (1987, pp54-61) Bob Connell calls this essentialist approach 'categorical theory'. Women and men are seen as 'internally undifferentiated general categories'. 'Over a range of issues, categoricism underplays the turbulence and contradictoriness within the social process of gender'. It 'tends to assimilate everything in the grim present to manifestations of male power and female subordination'.

In the gender and schooling literature the dichotomous categories are constructed by the power of boys (often reinforced by that of the teacher). A stereotypical picture is built up of a 'representative boy', characterised by traits of aggressiveness and dominance. An example of this approach comes from Kathleen Clarricoates (1987, p199):

The girls condemned boys for being rough and aggressive whilst the boys condemned girls for appearing to be the 'good pupils', since it is through the display of reverse qualities of what girls do that boys gain and reward status.

Another example is provided by Pat Mahony's book *Schooling for the Boys?* (1985), which presents a picture of boys' relationships with girls solely in terms of verbal abuse and sexual harassment. As AnnMarie Wolpe argues (1988, pp98-9), Mahony presents a linear argument,

ignoring the complexities of the issues with which she is dealing. [...]

Girls are portrayed as the victims of boys' domination. Schooling is reduced to a set of relationships structured through sexuality of the exaggerated male form. Nothing else seems to count.

There are two dangers inherent in the categorical approach. First, girls may be defined principally as the victims of the actions of boys. Secondly, boys are seen as conforming to a unitary masculine stereotype. This conception has been challenged by Connell (1989), who argues that the school is a site for the construction of and differentiation of a plurality of masculine identities. In the secondary school he investigates he identifies three: cool guys, swots and wimps. In their research into 14 and 15 year olds, Kessler, Ashenden, Connell and Dowsett (1985) also identify a differentiation among both male and female identities. They argue that 'The stereotype argument is ... seriously wrong in assuming that the school tends to impose just one sex-role pattern on its boys and one pattern on its girls' (p42). They develop the notion that

the school as an institution is characterized at any given time by a particular *gender regime*. This may be defined as the pattern of

practices that constructs various kinds of masculinity among staff and students, orders them in terms of prestige and power, and constructs a sexual division of labor within the institution. The gender regime is a state of play rather than a permanent condition.(p42)

Connell and Kessler et al. focus on the role of the official order of the school in constructing a range of gendered identities. Also writing in the Australian context, Walker (1988) shows how young people actively construct a range of gendered identities, some of which are sponsored by the school, some of which are constructed outside or in reaction to the school's 'official' gender regime.

## **CONCLUSION**

In this chapter a range of sociological perspectives on childhood and youth have been considered. The principal concern of sociological studies of children in the British context has been with 'pupil cultures'. This body of work has been important both substantively and methodologically. However, two limitations have been noted. The first is its inadequate theorisation of the relationship between micro-social processes and structures and those of the wider society, a characteristic of the symbolic interactionist perspective within which the majority of the research into pupil cultures has been situated. The second, important in relation to the purpose of the present study, is its neglect of aspects of children's cultures which are not central to the role of 'pupil'. Another strand within the studies of children in school has been influenced by Foucault. While usefully directing attention to the ways in which

children are regulated within the school regime, it neglects the active role of children in collectively attempting to evade and contest their subordination.

The second substantial body of research that is relevant to this study is 'youth studies' within the field of cultural studies. Work within a marxist cultural studies framework has been particularly influential, as have those within a feminist perspective, as well as some important studies of youth cultures from a non-marxist standpoint. In this chapter a critical assessment has been made of some of the key debates within this field, and the principal theoretical coordinates of the present study have been outlined.

## CHAPTER 4

### RACISM AND THEORY

The focus of this study is on children's cultures with especial reference to 'race'. It is beyond the scope of this study to present an analysis of racism in society in any detail. It is possible, however, to summarise briefly the key points of the perspective on racism within which this study is written, before focusing more closely on the most important theoretical perspectives on 'race' and children.

Firstly, racism has a situational specificity. Stuart Hall warns against 'extrapolating a common and universal structure to racism, which remains essentially the same, outside of its specific historical location' (Hall 1980, p337). It follows that 'One must start, then, from the concrete historical 'work' which racism accomplishes under specific historical conditions' (p338). Hall is speaking of 'race' at the level of society as a whole, but his remarks apply equally to the study of 'race' in a specific region of society, in this case the subcultures of children.

The study takes a second point from Hall: his emphasis on how racism must, 'to become a real and historical political force, connect with the lived experiences of the 'silent majorities' (Hall et al 1978, p30). Again, in the context of childhood, the study looks at the part that 'race' plays in the lived experiences of children.

Thirdly, 'race' cannot be understood in isolation from other social processes. As Robert Miles insists (1989, p133) that 'although there may be formal (or political) reasons to attempt to assess the independent impact of the expression of racism, it should always be remembered that those who articulate it and those who are its object are located in a wider, complex web of social relations'. The task here is to identify what are the most salient social relations in children's cultures, and how 'race' relates to them.

Fourthly, the study shares Hall's rejection of the idea that racism is a powerful ideology that imprints itself on passive subjects. Racism 'is not a set of mistaken perceptions... [It arises] because of the concrete problems of different classes and groups in the society. Racism represents the attempt ideologically to construct those conditions, contradictions and problems in such a way that they can be dealt with and deflected at the same moment' (Hall et al 1978, p35).

In this context, Ali Rattansi (1992) has recently criticised an early formulation of Miles and his co-author Phizacklea for saying that racism is based on an attempt to understand 'immediate daily experience' (Phizacklea and Miles 1979, p118). He charges them with an empiricism which 'writes out the significance of interpretive *frameworks* through which events, processes and facts are *constructed*. Experience, that is, is *produced*, rather than simply *registered* (Rattansi 1992, p33). While Rattansi is right to stress the way in which race provides interpretive frameworks, it is a point which Miles had already elaborated in his book *Racism* (1989): 'Ideologies are never only received but are also constructed and reconstructed by people



responding to their material and cultural circumstances in order to comprehend, represent and act in relation to those circumstances' (p132). For Miles, racism is not just a cognitive ideology, it is a behavioural ideology: it provides a rationale and motivation for social action as well as a framework for interpretation: 'racism may take the form of a relatively coherent theory, exhibiting a logical structure and adducing evidence in its support, but it also appears in the form of a less coherent assembly of stereotypes, images, attributions, and explanations which are constructed and employed to negotiate everyday life' (1989, p79).

It follows from this perspective on 'race' that the study of 'race' in children's lives needs to be situated in an analysis of its context - the experiences, cultures and ideologies of children. A similar view is taken by Carrington and Short (1989), who say of the studies of racism among children that they refer to:

They clearly dispel all notions of childhood innocence, as far as 'race' is concerned. We do not need more evidence of racism in young children but rather guidance on how to combat it. In the first instance this means gaining more insight into how children understand 'race', the beliefs they have about racial and ethnic differences and how these differences are explained. For no teaching can be effective unless it makes contact with children's existing knowledge. (1989, p57)

Cohen (1989) makes a similar point:

educational thinking has been dominated by 'functionalist' theories of institutionalised racism which neglect its micro-foundations in codes of cultural transmission. As a result we have schools with 'anti-racist policy statements' inscribed like Holy Tablets in their prospectus, but absolutely no understanding of how to get to grips educationally with the complex realities of popular prejudice as encountered daily in the classroom or playground. (p71).

In the absence of that understanding the tendency is to adopt a pathological approach, as Williams notes: 'the focus upon racist incidents in schools [...] is presented in a way which is anti-white working-class, who are portrayed as uncouth or uneducated' (1985, p342).

### **THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON 'RACE' AND CHILDREN**

This section considers some of the theoretical perspectives on 'race' and children that emerged during the 1980s.

Frances Aboud's book *Children and Prejudice* (1988) offers, from a social psychological perspective, probably the most detailed examination currently available of racism in childhood. Aboud discusses three types of explanation of children's racism. One, which she calls the inner state or authoritarian theory of prejudice, explains prejudice as stemming 'from an inability to accept and control one's aggressive impulses as a result of the harsh way in which one's parents dealt

with them (p21). The other two she refers to as social reflection theory and social-cognitive developmental theory. Social reflection theory explains racial prejudice as the product of societal factors, perhaps transmitted by the child's parents. Aboud makes the following criticisms of social reflection theory (p101):

- i) 'it cannot explain the shift from social values to parental attitudes as the critical determinant of children's attitudes';
- ii) 'it cannot explain what aspect of social status is understood by children from 4 to 7 years';
- iii) it can't explain 'the effects of exposure on the child's awareness of social status, and...why children under 8 years are not affected by exposure'.

And also (p19):

- iv) it implies children are passive receptacles;
- v) it can't explain why racial prejudice doesn't get stronger with age;
- vi) it can't account for individual differences in degree of prejudice.

Aboud rejects social reflection theory in favour of social-cognitive developmental theory. She suggests the following developmental progression (p28ff). White children acquire racial prejudices at 3-5 years. At age 7-8 prejudice begins to decline. She says that more than half of the studies show this, though some studies show no decline (and Milner 1983, p112-3, which she does not refer to, speaks of 'a gradual intensification of prejudice'). According to Aboud racial prejudice is primarily (i.e. in the period of its strongest influence, from 4-7 years) the inevitable product of two innate psychological processes. 'My view is that the early focus on the self and the early dominance of affective and need states can explain prejudice

from 4 to 7 years' (p103). At this age racial prejudice is the result of 'wariness and fear' of 'strangers who are different and unpredictable'. The next developmental stage is dominated by perceptions. 'Dissimilar people are disliked'. Only in the third stage, from 7 years, does the emergence of cognitive understanding produce a decline in racial prejudice. She argues that 'prejudice may be regarded as *inevitable* but not necessarily enduring because it is based on inevitable aspects of a young child's way of thinking which eventually disappear (p22 - emphasis added).

She sees the age of about 7 as a crucial turning point at which cognitive capacities undergo a qualitative development, from, in Piaget's terms, the stage of pre-operational thinking to that of concrete operational thinking, whose two main elements are *conservation* and *perspective-taking*. The growth of cognitive capacities allows racial prejudice to be released from the dominance of affect and perceptions and subjected to rationality, resulting in a decline in prejudice from the age of 7. During middle childhood children's ethnic stereotyping begins to break down, as they recognise intragroup differences and intergroup similarities. More precisely, children first develop an understanding of group categorisation and identity, and later a greater understanding of individual difference. The two critical ages are just prior to 8 years, and 12 (p120).

Aboud's conclusion is that, while the exact relationship of these ethnic cognitions to racial prejudice remains to be clarified, it seems that their development correlates with a decline in prejudice (p115).

Two types of criticism can be addressed to Aboud's argument. The first is a specific application to 'race' in children's development of the general critique of Piagetian cognitive developmentalism made by Donaldson (1978) and others. In his own study of 'race' and children, Cohen (1989) summarises the Piagetian view as follows: children age 7 to 8 years 'are still at the stage of 'concrete operations' and lack the social and cognitive means to transcend their ego-centric, and by extension ethnocentric, view of the world'. He argues that 'children's actual capacities do not necessarily correspond to the Piagetian schema, precisely because of the rationalistic bias built into its experimental procedures. In other contexts and faced with other tasks children may well prove more advanced in their competences'. (p20). He gives examples of young children understanding the arbitrary nature of games, or interpreting television programmes.

The second type of criticism refers to the way Aboud conceives of sociological and psychological explanations. First, she explicitly states that she regards psychological explanations as possessing greater explanatory power (1988, p75). Secondly, her characterisation of social reflection theory depends upon a reductionist and crudely determinist notion of the relationship between society and the individual. There is a vast sociological literature, particularly within the marxist and Weberian traditions, which retains the concept of societal determination, but addresses the complex and contradictory processes which mediate between the individual, as an active social agent, and social structure. The consequence of undervaluing the status of sociological factors is to fall into the opposite trap of

psychological determinism, which leads Aboud to explain racism in terms of innate mental predispositions: fear of strangers; dislike of dissimilarity.

Flowing from the particular psychological perspective Aboud adopts are two major limitations of method. The first is to examine racial prejudice in isolation from the totality of social processes of childhood. The *a priori* marking-off of a limited area of enquiry as concerned with ethnicity closes off numerous other aspects of children's lives which may be racialised. (Miles makes the same point in general terms). The second limitation is her focus on attitudes but not on behaviour, and hence her reliance on certain types of experimental evidence, particularly to the exclusion of ethnographic enquiry. The result is that she leaves almost all of the real lives of children unexamined.

### **THE CONTACT HYPOTHESIS**

Probably the most prevalent idea underlying the response of teachers and others to the issue of 'race' in education in the 1980s was the 'contact hypothesis'. Hewstone and Brown (1986, p1) define it as 'the long and widely held belief that interaction between individuals belonging to different groups will reduce ethnic prejudice and intergroup tension'. According to Troyna (1993), it provided what Bullivant identifies as one of three key assumptions of 'multicultural education': 'That learning about other cultures will reduce children's prejudice and discrimination towards those from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds'. It is not the intention here to attempt to give a full account of the complex history of the hypothesis (see Pettigrew

1986; Hewstone and Brown 1986), or of its role in the development of multicultural education in Britain (Troyna 1993). The aim is to shed some light on the social psychological processes of inter-ethnic relations by focusing on what, following Hewstone and Brown (1986), is the central problem with the contact hypothesis: its neglect of the distinction between interpersonal and intergroup relationships. It is a distinction that is often ignored in the literature and in popular thinking in education about racial prejudice and children, in spite of the fact that Allport (1954), perhaps the most influential theorist of the contact hypothesis, included the question 'Is the contact perceived in terms of intergroup relations or not perceived as such?' in his criteria for productive contact (p263).

#### **RACISM AND THE SOCIAL GROUP**

The distinction between interpersonal and intergroup relations is central to the work of Henri Tajfel. His concern is with

The social psychological processes which intervene between the existence of various kinds of intergroup conflicts and the construction of widely diffused systems of belief about the ingroups and outgroups ...[which then]... become an inherent part of the intergroup social situation. (1981, p225).

Tajfel suggests that behaviour can be located along a continuum between the two ideal-hypothetical poles of interpersonal and intergroup (1981, p238ff).

'Interpersonal' refers to any encounter between two or more people in which the interaction that takes place is determined by the personal relationships between the individuals and by their respective individual characteristics. 'Intergroup' refers to behaviour which is determined by their membership of different social groups or categories. The position taken up on this continuum is not static: it varies according to social situation and to the strength of group identity. As Tajfel (1981, p238) says, 'There is a reciprocal (or 'dialectical') relationship between social settings and situations on the one hand, and the reflection or expression in them of subjective group memberships on the other'.

A graphic illustration of this key distinction between interpersonal and intergroup relationships can be found in Walker's (1988) study of male adolescent youth groups of different ethnicities in Australia. Walker reports an argument between the 'Aussies' - of Anglo descent - and the 'Greeks' - of Greek background - over nationality (p86). Two of the Aussies are speaking.

Reevesey      ...we're still y' mates, even though y' nothin' better  
than...

Fred            You're just greasy wogs. [Laughter.]

Tajfel identifies three components of 'groupness':

(i) Cognitive: the recognition or identification of a group with specific attributes;



(ii) Evaluative: the positive or negative value connotations placed on the group and its attributes;

(iii) Affective: the emotions (of like/dislike etc) that may accompany group recognition;

Tajfel argues that one main function of social groups for their members is to engender social identities, and that this meets a postulated basic human need for a positive self-concept (1981, p254). His definition of social identity is 'that *part* of an individual's self-concept which derives from his [*sic*] knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership' (1981, p255). Groups exist only in relation to other groups, and the values ascribed to groups arise in comparison with other groups. In other words, society consists of a complex and stratified network of social groups which serves as 'a system of orientation which creates and defines the individual's own place in a society'.

The crucial pivot, and perhaps the critical flaw, of Tajfel's theory is the notion that positive social identities arise *inevitably at the expense of* other social groups. Tajfel conducted a series of experiments - the 'minimal' intergroup experiments - which attempted to establish the minimal conditions under which an individual would distinguish between an ingroup and an outgroup. In order to create such conditions, Tajfel eliminated from the experimental situation all the variables that normally lead to ingroup favouritism or discrimination against the outgroup. When the experimenters then introduced the notion of group into the situation, the subjects

acted on the basis of competition between their own group and the other, even to the extent of preferring behavioural strategies that accentuated group differences even if they led to reduced benefits for the ingroup, rather than strategies that resulted in greater benefits for both ingroup and outgroup but minimised intergroup differences. Tajfel concluded that 'It is the assumed need for differentiation (or the establishment of psychological distinctiveness between the groups) which seems to provide, under some conditions, the major outcome of the sequence social categorization-social identity-social comparison' (1981, pp273-4). Tajfel summarises his thesis as follows:

The argument presented here postulates that the reason for this cognitive, behavioural and evaluative intergroup differentiation is in the need that the individuals have to provide social meaning through social identity to the intergroup situation, experimental or any other; and that this need is fulfilled through the creation of intergroup differences when such differences do not in fact exist, or the attribution of value to, and the enhancement of, whatever differences that do exist. (1981, p276)

In other words, there is a postulated need for a positive self-concept, which in part at least takes the form of positive social identities derived from the membership of positively evaluated social groups. The ascription of a positive identity to the ingroup arises from the evaluation of outgroups as inferior. While this process may trade on existing social categorisations made available by the wider society - and Tajfel refers in some detail to racism in this context - it is an autonomous cognitive

process in its own right. Social identity, in these relational terms, is never 'secure'. It has to be continually remade in cultural (and possibly economic, political etc) struggle between inferior and superior groups (1981, p278ff). Ethnicity is one of the main criteria that British society makes available for social categorisation, resulting in the acquisition by white group members of racist attitudes integral to group and therefore personal identity.

With regard to children, Tajfel's theory of intergroup relations takes us beyond explanations dependent upon a simple passive structural-functionalist socialisation into adult norms by introducing the active notion of 'identity-making' by the child through group membership. But it is a profoundly pessimistic theory, in which the strength of a child's positive identity is seen as necessarily proportional to the negative identity ascribed to outgroup members. It is also a highly determinist theory which does not seem capable of explaining dissidence from group norms: for example, in racist societies, members of the dominant group who hold anti-racist attitudes.

A number of criticisms have been made of Tajfel's theory. Aboud (1988) questions the proposed causal relationship between positive social identity and negative outgroup evaluation. She refers to research evidence showing that among young white children there seems to be no relation between self-esteem and racial prejudice. 'White children seem to derive and maintain their self-esteem through comparisons with their own group on performance and status, and not by disliking a minority group' (p94).

Caddick (1982) poses the question: 'under what conditions will a group which holds an illegitimately ascendant position within a web of intergroup relationships accept or actively work towards an improvement in the standing or circumstances of a group (or group) less well placed?' (p150). In a specific response to Caddick's question, Tajfel (1982) locates the possible dynamic of change not within social identity theory at all (i.e. to the development of more equitable social identifications based on newly recognised dimensions of comparability) but in power relations. The only source of dominant group change is 'when the ascendant group is not entirely sure of its power to impose its decisions on the outgroup' (p488). This opens up the issue of what the relationship is between social identity theory and power relations. It also appears to rule out the possibility of anti-racist change in schools with a small minority of Black pupils.

Caddick offers an alternative solution by drawing on 'equity theory'. Equity theory 'asserts that the perception of injustice or unfairness in social relationships leads the perceiver to feel distressed. Such distress is uncomfortable and motivates attempts to alter the conditions which promote it. One such alteration is action aimed at redressing the injustice by restoring actual equity to the relationship' (p146). Caddick poses equity theory from outside social identity theory, as a countervailing psychological principle. It is the contention of this study that children certainly have strongly developed notions of fairness and justice, of equity, but that these arise primarily not from an 'equity principle' as a psychological universal but, as suggested earlier, from reciprocity within the peer-group.

The book *Changing the Subject* (Henriques et al 1984) advances a radical critique of the dominant social constructionist paradigm in psychology from a post-structuralist standpoint. In the chapter by Henriques (1984) on racism he criticises a 'cognitivist' explanation: it 'locates the responsibility for prejudice with particular individuals by theorizing its cause in terms of defects in the information available to, and the information-processing capacity of, the interpreting subject' (p24). He specifically criticises Tajfel's 'cognitivist explanation' of prejudice 'as error based on arbitrary mistakes' (p81). His conclusion is the charge that 'the racist *status quo* is maintained to a large extent not only through coercive and blatantly racist practices, but through the liberal position which criticizes these as aberrations [...]. I have thus argued that it is important to recognize the part played by social psychology's explanation of racism as residing within the information-processing mechanisms of individuals' (p88). In short, he charges Tajfel with objectively promoting racism. This charge is misconceived because Henriques attacks Tajfel for a position he doesn't hold. Tajfel states explicitly: 'I do not believe that 'explanations' of social conflicts and social injustice can be mainly or primarily psychological' (1981, p7),

### **SELF-CATEGORIZATION THEORY**

John Turner's (1987) self-categorization theory represents a further development of the social identity theory associated with Tajfel. The focus of self-categorization theory is on the functioning of the social self-concept, i.e. social identity (Turner 1987, pp44-46). Psychological group formation is the result of perceived social identity. It takes place when two or more people define themselves in terms of some

shared ingroup-outgroup categorization, i.e. when the intergroup similarities are more salient than the interpersonal differences in a specific setting. (Turner rejects the theory that group formation is the result of interpersonal interdependence for needs satisfaction). Turner, like Tajfel, postulates that people are motivated to maintain a positive self-evaluation, which operates at any salient level of self-categorization. At the interpersonal level people are motivated to compare themselves favourably with other individuals. At the intergroup level, people are motivated to compare the ingroup favourably with the outgroup. (This is not to say that the self or the ingroup cannot be evaluated negatively. See pp58-9).

Turner distinguishes between interpersonal attraction, referring to favourable attitudes towards people as unique individuals, and group cohesion, referring to mutual attraction between ingroup members *qua* group members. In other words, the bonds that hold the group together are *not interpersonal* relationships, but conceptually distinct *group* processes. (This is the key distinction between self-categorization theory and the social cohesion model that is prevalent in social psychology. If group cohesion is defined in terms of interpersonal relations then the group as a concept disappears: it is nothing more than the sum of its parts). The relative importance of interpersonal attraction and intragroup relations within the group vary from situation to situation according to the degree of salience they evoke of group membership.

The particular aspect of Turner's theory that is important here is his conception that individuals have multiple self-concepts, which are situation-specific. One element

of the self-concept is self-categorization. Self-categorizations exist as part of a hierarchical series of classifications. There are at least three levels of self-categorization important in the social self-concept: the superordinate level of the self as human being; the intermediate level of ingroup-outgroup categorizations in terms of social groups or categories such as gender, class, ethnicity etc, and also of smaller-scale social groups, including friendship groups; and the subordinate level of personal self-categorization as an individual, i.e. in interpersonal terms. Self-categorization theory rejects the notion common in social psychology that the personal self is privileged as the 'real' self. 'Social self-perception tends to vary along a continuum from the perception of self as a unique person (...maximum difference perceived between self and ingroup members) to the perception of the self as an ingroup category (maximum similarity to ingroup members and difference from outgroup members)' (p49).

The process by which people see themselves mainly in terms of social category membership Turner calls 'depersonalization'. Depersonalization of self-perception is the basic psychological process underlying group phenomena.

Depersonalization, however, is not a loss of individual identity, nor a loss or submergence of the self in the group (as in the concept of de-individuation),... It is the *change* from the personal to the social level of identity, a change in the nature and content of the self-concept corresponding to the functioning of self-perception at a more inclusive level of abstraction. In many respects depersonalization may be seen as

a *gain* in identity, since it represents a mechanism whereby individuals may act in terms of the social similarities and differences produced by the historical development of human society and culture. (p51)

Turner's argument provides the basis for refuting Short's (1993) critique of Troyna and Hatcher (1992). His critique rests on a misunderstanding of what the 'contact hypothesis' contends, in the context of the work of Tajfel and Turner. It is not a question of the simple generalisation of a positive evaluation, as a result of personal contact, of one member of a social group to the other members. It is a process in which interpersonal contact can trigger a shift in the level of categorisation in operation. For example, as will be seen later in this study, a shift from 'black' as the salient social category to the superordinate category of 'human being'.

The concept of multiple situation-specific social group identification offers an escape from the cognitive determinism of Tajfel's theory. Turner defines a person's social identity as the sum total of social identifications that they employ. He hypothesises that social identity 'has the overall coherence and organisation which produces a sense of unity and consistency...' (p19). He uses the analogy of an orchestra. But if social categories stand in relations of *contradiction* to each other, there arises the possibility of contradictions within social identities. In other words, there may be an inconsistency, which may need to be teased out and exploited, between, for example, how a white girl sees a black girl negatively as black but positively as a girl, or as a fellow pupil at school, or simply as a fellow human being, with needs and rights that transcend the ethnic boundary. This notion of



contradictory social identity transforms the consensual and functionalist character of the original theory into one which can explain white anti-racism as well as white racism.

### IDEOLOGY AND 'RACE'

The concept of contradiction and social identity is central to Teun van Dijk's (1987) analysis of the strategies of conversational discourse about 'race' used by white people. He notes the characteristic form of 'I'm not racist but...'. He explains the contradiction as one between the speakers' actual racist attitudes and their desire to create an impression of not being prejudiced. These strategies of self-presentation and impression-management serve the function of persuading the listener by presenting the speaker favourably as rational and unprejudiced.

Discourse has a cognitive dimension and an interactional dimension. Discourse is one of the principal ways in which racist cognitions are socially reproduced: not just transmitted but amplified because people talk in order to persuade. Racial prejudice therefore is not just a state of mind but an active element in 'social information processing' (p180-1). The *interactionist* dimension of racist discourse can be analysed in terms of strategies of self-presentation, persuasion etc (p316). Both dimensions involve not just individual but also, and primarily, *group* processes, and this is where van Dijk's work connects with that of Tajfel and Turner. For van Dijk,

prejudice and racism are not characteristics of individual persons but involve people as group members. Discourse and communication about ethnic minority groups can be understood only in this double social perspective: They are social events at the interpersonal (micro) level but, at the same time, they are instances of a particular form of intragroup and intergroup relationships, that is, of higher-level social, cultural and historical processes. (1987, p26)

Racism is an ideology, but ideologies are *group*-based (p193-4). White individuals speak as members of a dominant group. Racist discourse simultaneously reproduces racist ideologies and reproduces the ingroup as a group (pp22-4), and thus the social identity of its members. People manage discourse in order to 'present themselves as competent social members of the in-group' (p379). This entails ongoing processes of self-presentation during conversation. 'People monitor this social membership at several levels at the same time, and may talk simultaneously as a woman, as a professor, as a white in-group member, as a neighbourhood member, as a Dutch person, and so on in varying hierarchies of relevance, and enact such self- and other-categorizations in strategically effective ways in their interaction' (p346).

In a discussion of van Dijk's ideas Michael Billig (1988) comments on his distinction between the cognitive and the interactional, between

'the effective expression of semantic macrostructures (themes)' and the 'interactional and social goal' of creating the desired impression in the

hearer. He goes on to assert that 'these two different sets of goals may be sometimes in conflict: a direct or 'honest' expression of the beliefs or the opinions from the speaker's situation model may lead to negative social evaluation of the speaker by the hearer'. (1988, p96)

Billig argues that for van Dijk this is a contradiction *between* ideology and interactional strategy, not a contradiction *between* ideologies themselves. But for Billig, interactional strategies are themselves ideological, and therefore the conflict embodied in 'I'm not racist but...' is one 'within individuals, who have two contrasting ideological repertoires on which to draw. To use Althusser's terminology it is this ideological contradiction which 'interpellates' the subject' (1988, p97).

Billig's conceptualisation of the interactional domain as itself ideological is an advance over van Dijk. This distinction between what Billig refers to as thematic ideologies and interactional ideologies can be developed in two ways.

First, the idea that the two ideological domains, the thematic and that of interactional strategy, are independently variable, can be elaborated. Billig and van Dijk only explore one possible variant: racist beliefs combined with non-racist interactional strategies in discourse. But we can apply the same approach to other interactional contexts, and in particular to episodes of racialised interaction between white and ethnic minority children. Here the interactional goals, and the ideologies in which they are embedded, are very different from the van Dijk/Billig scenario. The

interactional goal is not to persuade the listener that one is not racist, but to give offence by using racist terms. Here the interactional ideology is racist: the question is, what is the character of the thematic ideologies of 'race', that is, the beliefs, which the user holds? Are they necessarily racist too?

A case in point is the distinction made by Dunning, Murphy and Williams (1988) between 'instrumental' and 'expressive' aspects of violence.

Violence takes an 'instrumental' form when it is rationally and dispassionately chosen as a means for securing the achievement of a given goal. It is 'expressive' when it is engaged in as an emotionally satisfying and pleasurable end in itself or when it takes place under the impact of a powerful negative emotion such as frustration and/or anger.  
(p236)

They also emphasise that these are not ideal types but 'balances between interconnected polarities' (p237), i.e. each episode of violence comprises a combination of the two forms.

Secondly, the concept of ideology allows for the possibility of inconsistency and contradiction. Billig notes this in warning against the frequent practice of social psychologists, uncomfortable with notions of cognitive or attitudinal ambivalence, who impose a unitary model of consciousness by claiming that one attitude is more deeply held and therefore is the 'real' attitude. Billig uses this idea to discuss the

contradiction between a racist ideology, regarded as unitary, governing attitudes and opinions about 'race', and ideologies of rationality, which he derives from liberal themes stemming from the Enlightenment, governing accounts of 'race'. But he doesn't address the possibility of *anti*-racist elements within discourse, and therefore of contradictions within ideologies of 'race' themselves. (Cohen (1989) gives an interesting case-study of just such a contradiction - he calls it 'splitting' - in a boy with a white mother and an Egyptian father). Nor does Billig pose the question of contradictions within ideologies of interaction, though the possibility was recognised by Allport (1954), who distinguished between racist talk and non-racist behaviour. 'Around the age of eight, children often *talk* in a highly prejudiced manner...But the rejection is chiefly verbal...they may still *behave* in a relatively democratic manner (1954, p310, quoted in Carrington and Short \*p44).

## GRAMSCI AND IDEOLOGY

Turner notes that society makes available preformed categories for depersonalization (i.e. social identities to be assumed in specific situations), but admits that 'The self-categorization theory has as yet little that is especially distinctive to say about the internalization of preformed ingroup-outgroup categorizations' (p52). The issue here, that of the relationship between ideological notions made available at a societal level and individual consciousness, is illuminated by the work of Gramsci.

Gramsci has made a particularly significant contribution to our understanding of the concept of ideology. First, he made an important distinction between elaborated and common-sense ideologies. Elaborated ideologies are the coherent bodies of thought produced and disseminated by intellectuals. Common sense is the 'concretely lived culture of a particular class or group, influenced both by external ideologies and internally generated understandings' (Gramsci, quoted in Williams 1985, p337). Common sense ideologies arise from the practical activity of daily life, which furnishes them with critical or potentially critical elements. For Gramsci, common sense is not uniform: it is 'an ambiguous, contradictory and multiform concept' (Forgacs p346) containing elements of both cultural reproduction and contestation. Furthermore, practical activity is not the only source of critical ideas. Elements of elaborated ideologies intervene into common sense understandings: 'common sense is not something rigid and immobile, but is continually transforming itself, enriching itself with scientific ideas and with philosophical opinions which have entered ordinary life' (Gramsci 1971, p326n). Common sense contains therefore both elements of dominant ideologies and elements of critical or potentially critical ideologies: 'Stone Age elements and principles of a more advanced science, prejudices from all past phases of history at the local level and intuitions of a future philosophy which will be that of a human race united the world over' (1971, p324).

Billig and Sabucedo argue (1990, p28) that 'common-sense, even in its most reactionary aspects, can contain the possibility of a critique of the present'. They give the example of religious notions which provide a standpoint for a critique of modern 'scientific rationality'. In the context of racism, elements of liberal discourse

- discourses of 'rights' for example - may be interpreted in ways that either confirm racist discourses, as Billig (1988) and van Dijk (1987) illustrate, or provide a basis for a critique of them.

There are several recent ethnographic studies that have focused on the ways that themes of racism and antiracism may coexist within the same subcultural configuration, and consequently may coexist, contradictorily, in white discourse and consciousness. Of these, the studies by Roger Hewitt, Simon Jones and Les Back are of particular importance. All three writers share a recognition of two aspects of a new situation: emergence of multiracial youth cultures in the inner cities, and the relatively common incidence of multiracial friendships that exist within them.

Roger Hewitt speaks of

noticing, for example, that friendship between black and white youth was extremely common and was grounded in an experience of being born and growing up through primary school in mixed working-class neighbourhoods together, occupying the same recreational spaces, experiencing closely meshed life worlds and growing into adolescence with far more friendship and other network ties than had been true of their parents' generation. Secondly, black youth had been forging a distinctive and varied set of cultural practices that seemed to construct points of paradoxical access to whites...(1989, p2).

This new culture has given rise to what Hewitt calls 'strongly expressed, community-based anti-racist stances' (1989, p2). Simon Jones describes how some white youth had developed 'alternative' explanations of social and political events to the prevailing discourses', particularly of racist ideologies propagated through newspapers and television (1988, pp224-5). But for Jones such explicit antiracist perspectives were not the predominant outcome.

The most pertinent and effective repudiations of racism, rather, lay embedded in the situated interaction and forms of negotiation evolved by young people themselves. For such was the intimacy of such interaction for some, that the relevance of racial stereotypes and divisions could be mitigated in the course of everyday social exchange and experiences.[...] Declarations that 'colour doesn't matter' and 'it's what's in the heart that counts' and 'you can't judge a book by its cover' rested on the sincere belief that the question of racial difference was, or at least should have been, of no significance to personal relations between black and white. (pp225-6).

There are themes here that are echoed in the context of children's cultures. The point to focus on here is that of contradictory consciousness. Shared experience, cultural orientations and cross-racial friendships did not automatically lead to antiracism. 'It was thus entirely feasible for young whites to maintain certain common-sense racist ideas, while continuing to associate with young blacks and appropriate black culture' (Jones 1988, p216). And again Jones speaks of



the deeply contradictory nature of white responses about race. In struggling to resolve the contradictions that resulted from their friendships and cultural-musical influences, young whites constantly had to battle not only against the weight of peer-group pressure, but also against other, more general, ideological influences. (1988, p219)

Jones talks specifically of 'common sense' in terms that locate him within a Gramscian framework: 'Perhaps a more contradictory interpretation of 'common sense' is required here, one which looks at the elements of practical 'good sense' in the white working-class consciousness of race and class. For if this book has shown anything, it is that such consciousness is deeply contradictory' (1988, p235).

Contradiction in ideologies is a central theme of Hewitt's (1986) research into black and white adolescent relationships. For example, he discusses the relationship between one white group's political attitudes - most of them were Labour supporters - and the racism of their everyday behaviour (p28):

Indeed, despite the Labour majority, there was a high degree of tolerance for, and even lack of interest in, the *explicit* political and broad social philosophies of members. What varied far less were the group practices and beliefs surrounding loyalty, and the values of personal and group pride to which racist ideas and practices became attached. It is therefore necessary to discriminate between racial ideology as an

explicit philosophy, and racial ideology enshrined in a set of behavioural practices which knitted with the overriding mores of the group.

Conversely, in Hewitt's other research locality the interracial group processes '*interrupted* any process of ideological embodiment in social forms with respect to adolescent racism' (p80 - emphasis added).

Tajfel and Turner make the distinction between interpersonal and intergroup and argue that group dynamics are not just the sum of individual relationships and have their own specific effectivity. This is also a central theme of Hewitt's work. For example, Hewitt quotes a discussion (pp205-10) between a group of black and white girls in which the black girls condemn one of the white girls' use of creole and other markers of black culture: 'the ambiguity of such marking practices by whites springs from the conflict of personal friendship and group membership. This is an area in which individual friendships and structured social relationships come face to face: where friendship, facilitated by approximately shared class positions, becomes transected by the perceived racial divisions within the economic order' (p205. See also pp38-40).

#### **CHILDREN, RACISM AND SOCIETY**

Davey's conclusion is that children's racial prejudices are primarily the product not of contact, or lack of it, with black people, nor of parents' prejudiced attitudes, but of attitudes prevalent in society generally and particularly in the locality (1983: see

p129). The problem then is to explain why and how this process takes place. Simply exposure to the racist attitudes of others does not guarantee their acquisition. There is no generalising tendency for children to imitate adult behaviour: learning is selective. We need to identify processes that mediate between social structure at societal and local levels and the child's developing consciousness and unconscious dispositions.

A common-sense view is that racist prejudice among children is largely the consequence of the attitudes of their parents. Evidence for a correlation between children's racial attitudes and those of their parents is weak. Hartman and Husband (1974) found a very low correlation between parental and child attitudes, but a high correlation between children's scores and the attitudes they imputed to others including their parents (which throws some doubt on research that has relied on children's reports of their parents' views). Similarly, Katz (1983) states that 'Commonsense notions strongly suggest that parents are the primary socializers, but research has not substantiated this supposition' (p66). The most recent research is perhaps Davey (1983), who found that inter-ethnic group relations were not a major concern to parents, that they did not attempt to inculcate their children with racist views, nor conversely did they show any great commitment to inter-group equality and justice. He did find a correlation between the views of children and those of those parents at both extremes of the ethnocentricity spectrum (see pp 169-170). (See Davey 1983, pp145-8, for a summary of the research evidence, some conflicting).

These conclusions confirm Stephens' findings concerning the general political socialisation of primary school children (1982, p157). She concluded that the role of the family was not decisive, and that cognitive processes in political understanding develop to a considerable extent independently of family influences.

Another common-sense notion is that racist prejudice among children is the product of the mass media. Again, this view is not supported by the limited research evidence. Hartmann and Husband (1974) conclude that 'heavy consumption of mass media does not in itself lead to greater or less hostility towards coloured people [*sic*]. Hostility seems to be much more a situationally generated characteristic' (p109). In addition, it should be noted that the media now are more aware of issues of racial stereotyping than they were twenty years ago, and children are exposed to many positive images of black people.

## CONCLUSION

In this chapter the perspectives on 'race' and children of two of the most influential writers in this area, Aboud and Tajfel, have been discussed. While their approaches are very different - Aboud's focus is on the development of the individual child while Tajfel's concern is with group identity processes - they are both based on a psychological determinist theories of racism in children: developmental determinism in the case of Aboud, cognitive determinism in the case of Tajfel. An escape from Tajfel's cognitive determinism which preserves his important contribution to the understanding of group processes and identity formation is provided by the work of

Turner and of Billig, centring on the notion of multiple social identities and therefore of inconsistencies and contradictions within consciousness. This is a fundamental theme of the work of Gramsci, and he provides a sociological perspective within which these issues of consciousness and identity can be anchored. Some recent work by three British sociologists, Back, Hewitt and Jones, demonstrates the value of a Gramscian approach to empirical studies of 'race' in youth cultures and, by extension, in children's cultures too.

## CHAPTER 5

### RESEARCH ON RACISM AND CHILDREN

This chapter begins with a brief overview of the development of official responses to the issue of racist incidents. In this context, research into racism and children is then described and assessed.

It was during the 1980s that the issue of racial harassment began to receive considerable publicity. Reports of incidents, including a number of racism-inspired murders, appeared frequently in the national press. A number of research reports were published by agencies concerned with 'race relations'. In 1986 the Runnymede Trust published *Racial Violence and Harassment*, in 1987 the Commission for Racial Equality published *Living in Terror*, and Leeds CRC published its report on *Racial Harassment in Leeds 1985-6*, which presented a picture which seemed typical of the situation in urban areas of Britain. The prevalence of racist harassment, and the rising volume of opposition to it, produced two major responses from government in the form of Home Office reports: the first, *Racial Attacks*, was published in 1981; the second, *The Response to Racial Attacks and Harassment*, was published in 1989. The foreword to the 1989 report states that racial harassment is 'still a serious problem', and that 'it is vital that visible and vigorous action is taken to combat' it. The report rejects any 'tendency to view some minor incidents as

unpleasant but essentially trivial anti-social behaviour that does not warrant any special attention'. It recognises that there is a reluctance by white people to acknowledge the extent of racism in society, although racial prejudice is common. There is no reliable data on the size of the problem of racial harassment. Under-reporting is likely to be highest in the case of more minor incidents. In an echo of the Swann Report (1985), it suggests that 'members of the ethnic minorities living in predominantly white areas may be particularly at risk', and the extent of racial harassment in such areas is particularly likely to be hidden or under-estimated. 'In such areas there may be resistance to the idea that there could be racial problems, and perhaps a mistaken belief that discussion of racial harassment could somehow create a problem where none exists'.

In this wider context, a number of reports appeared in the 1980s which focused on the extent of racist incidents in schools and the role of the schools in combatting them. In 1984 the DES published a report on *Race Relations in Schools*, and Sir Keith Joseph, then Secretary of State for Education, gave a speech on the theme of 'Racial Bullying in Schools'. The issue received further attention in the Swann Report, published by the DES in 1985. It referred to the experience of racist harassment in school by ethnic minority pupils as 'an ever present and all pervasive shadow over their everyday lives' (p35), and suggested that 'The impact of racism on ethnic minority pupils may be particularly strong when they are present in relatively small numbers in schools and are thus less able to be mutually supportive in the face of racial abuse' (p33). In 1986 the racist murder of an Asian boy in the playground of Burnage High School in Manchester received widespread publicity, as did the

report published on the incident in 1989, *Murder in the Playground*. In 1987 the Commission for Racial Equality published a report, *Learning in Terror*, which suggested that the Burnage incident, while extreme, was the tip of an iceberg. Racist harassment was a part of the experience of many black pupils in schools. (See the bibliography in CRE (1988) pp 21-2 for additional references).

The fullest response by the government to racist harassment in the schools came in the Home Office report *The Response to Racial Attacks and Harassment* (1989). The report deals specifically (paragraphs 121-145) with racial harassment in relation to schools. 'Racial harassment ... presents a serious obstacle to equality of opportunities and it is Government policy that LEAs should attach priority to dealing with it.' The report gives a set of detailed recommendations as to how schools and LEAs should tackle the issue. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to evaluate the extent to which these recommendations have been put into practice (whether or not as a direct result of the Home Office report), or how consistent they may be with other government policies for school education. But there are three points in the report's analysis of racist harassment which relate to the research on which this paper is based: the idea that racist harassment is not trivial, that many white people may under-estimate its prevalence and significance, and that 'members of the ethnic minorities living in predominantly white areas may be particularly at risk'.

It is from that vantage point that the studies of racism in children's lives that have been most influential in British education in the recent period can be examined.



There are three main concerns of these empirical studies: studies of children's attitudes to 'race'; studies of inter-ethnic friendship patterns among children; and studies of racist incidents.

### **STUDIES OF RACIST ATTITUDES**

There is ample evidence of the existence of racial prejudice in young children (summarised in Milner 1983, Davey 1983 and Aboud 1988. See also Mould 1986).

However, much of the evidence has been elicited by research techniques and methodological standpoints which have been subject to criticism. One of the principal methods has been picture preference tests, originated by Horowitz (1936), who asked children questions such as 'who would you invite to your party?'

Subsequent studies have utilised similar approaches (e.g. Milner 1975, 1983; Davey 1983). Carrington and Short (1989) question what the meaning of such tasks is for the child. They draw on the criticisms made on similar grounds by Donaldson (1978) of Piaget's experiments on children's cognitive development.

In regard to attitudes to 'race', the experimental design tends to produce a choice based on the child's perceptions of convention, in this case that 'same race' is an appropriate criterion. Commenting on Davey (1983), Carrington and Short (1989) argue that the test invites children to make stereotypical choices. Even if the test design allows a non-stereotypical response, it can still be reinforcing stereotypes, since the only information made available in the task situation, which is otherwise divorced from any context, is 'race'. Their criticism echoes the more general critique

of attitudinal studies of 'race' made by Reicher (1986, pp162-5): 'the use of race is taken for granted and hence 'race' is naturalized' (p164).

Carrington and Short cite Short's experimental study of children aged 7-11, in which white children did not always reject black choices, as evidence that 'Prejudice within the age range and social class sampled appears to be situation specific in the sense that a child's antipathy towards children of another 'race' does not necessarily generalise to teachers of that 'race'. (Short 1981, p203, quoted in Carrington and Short 1989, p43). Carrington and Short's critique confirms in the context of 'race' in children's culture the general principles proposed by Hall and Miles: there is a powerful situation-specific element; and it is dependent on how children interpret situations, i.e. on the meaning that it has for them.

Carrington and Short regard Davey's test design as being further flawed by his failure to ask the children their reasons for their choices. 'The absence of such elaboration in Davey's work is not untypical of the genre and the value of the entire body of research is much diminished as a result' (p48). This limitation is characteristic of the quantitative studies that have predominated in the field of children and 'race'.

#### **STUDIES OF INTER-ETHNIC FRIENDSHIP**

A number of studies have investigated the extent of inter-ethnic friendship among children. In one of the largest studies, Davey and Mullin (1982) conducted a

sociometric study of the expressed friendship preferences of 4000 children age 7-11 years, and found a significant degree of ingroup preferences for all three ethnic groups studied (white, Asian and Afro-Caribbean). Denscombe (1983, 1986) and his co-workers also found a significant degree of own-group preference, but with a large majority of pupils also having friends from other ethnic groups. He made three criticisms of studies that relied on sociometric methods (1986). Firstly, the Criswell Index, used to measure ingroup bias, is a summarising statistic which may conceal individual differences. Secondly, sociometric results, that is, expressed choices, do not correspond closely to observed patterns of friendship. Thirdly, sociometric studies do not take account of the influence of situation as a factor determining preference. In the most recent report of this ongoing research project by Denscombe and his associates (Denscombe et al 1993) they present additional evidence supporting the findings of the earlier studies, and conclude that 'Perhaps more than anything else the findings demonstrate the need for ethnographic research which investigates *the meaning of friendship* for those involved (p142).

## **RACIST INCIDENTS**

A small number of studies have investigated racist incidents among children. Most research has focused on the most visible, and usually the most damaging, manifestations: physical attacks and name-calling. Other forms include teasing, jokes, graffiti, wearing badges, and exclusion (refusing to play with, sit next to or work with particular children). Racial behaviour in these terms can often be

invisible to teachers, not only because much of it takes place out of their sight, but because the more subtle forms may simply not be recognised as racial in character.

A definition of racist incidents is problematic. It is behaviour which draws on imputed racial or ethnic characteristics, whether physical or cultural, to which a negative value is ascribed. It is behaviour which usually is intended to hurt the recipient, though for various reasons it may not succeed in having that effect, and behaviour may be racist, that is, discriminatory in outcome, without any conscious intent - for example a child choosing where to sit may reject Black partners, and cause distress in doing so, while having no conscious intent to hurt and indeed being unaware of the pattern to his or her actions.

In 1985 the Commission for Racial Equality carried out a survey of the incidence of racist harassment in schools and colleges. The report of the survey was published in 1987 as *Learning in Terror*. It details many case studies of racist harassment, but the research methods on which the report is based (information from CRCs and monitoring groups, press reports and individual complaints) preclude it from offering any definitive conclusions, beyond the recognition that racial harassment does take place in schools.

It is not easy to assess how prevalent racial harassment is in schools. As has been noted, the research evidence which demonstrates that racist attitudes are widespread among white children of junior school age is largely based on experimental evidence, and does not examine the everyday behaviour of children. We are not

justified in assuming either that attitudes are translated into behaviour, or that behaviour under experimental conditions corresponds to behaviour in everyday life.

There is some limited evidence from ethnographic studies of children. Sluckin (1981) in his research found little evidence of racism (see pp12, 47, 56, 68). Woods (1987, p116) found evidence of some exclusion of black children from friendship groups and said the question needed further study. Pollard's research (1985) into the attitudes of 11 year olds is flawed by his choice, made for pragmatic reasons, to report the findings which relate only to the white children in the multiracial school in his study (p56). Blatchford and Sharp's (1994) edited volume on playground behaviour says little about racism, even in Kelly's chapter on 'Racism and sexism in the playground' (Kelly 1994). Wright (1992) places racist incidents in school within the context of child culture, which is the product of responses both to external factors (for example, the neighbourhood, social class and the ideology of the wider society) and the official order of the school. In the four schools she studied, black children experienced frequent racist abuse from some white children. These were almost exclusively aimed at Asian children, who they regarded as being at the bottom of the children's social hierarchy.

The literature on bullying among children has little to say about racism as a factor. In an overview, Besag (1989) says 'There is little research available on the bullying of ethnic minorities, although small-scale studies indicate that these pupils are especially at risk' (p17). An indication of the marginal status of 'race' in the literature on bullying is the space that Besag allocates to it in her book: two and a

half pages out of 183 pages. Since then, Malik (1990) has published a study of 612 secondary school children, of whom one-third reported that they had been bullied, and of these over a third reported being bullied by someone from another racial background. A significantly higher proportion of Asian children reported being bullied in this way. There are three smaller-scale British studies. Akhtar and Stronach (1986) found that racist behaviour was common in a mainly-white primary school. Riley (1988), in a study of one secondary school, found a high level of ethnic segregation at playtimes, and evidence of racist behaviour. Butt (1989) also studied one secondary school and found evidence of racist behaviour, especially name-calling.

The most recent research evidence is provided by Moran et al (1993). This is a methodologically rigorous study of 33 pairs of Asian and white children, matched for gender, age and school in order to isolate racial factors. The researchers claim that their general findings correspond to previous studies of bullying, and show no effects of ethnicity except in one respect: only Asian children reported name-calling on the basis of 'race'. Two points however can be made about this study. Firstly, the percentage of Asian children reporting racist name-calling - 18% - is relatively low compared to other studies, though the number of such respondents is so low - six children - that it casts doubt on the validity of the finding. Secondly, the limited illuminatory power of this study and the banality of the authors' explanation of their chief finding - 'a likely explanation would lie in the nature of racism, and the prejudice and power expressed by the majority (white) community' (p439) - raises

the question of the value of further studies that neglect the situational and interactional determinants of racist behaviour and the meaning of it for perpetrators.

There are is one large-scale study which presents a discrepant finding from the evidence referred to so far. Smith and Tomlinson (1989), in a study of mainly white secondary schools, concluded that 'there was little indication of overt racism in relations among pupils' (p62). They based their conclusion on the reports of parents: 'there is remarkably little criticism from parents that focuses on race relations matters. Just one per cent of parents mentioned racial attacks, or that black and white children don't get on' (p62).

The most extensive research study of racist incidents is by Kelly (1988), commissioned by the Macdonald Inquiry to investigate three non-inner-city majority-white secondary schools in Manchester. She used questionnaires with 902 11 and 14 year olds. Her main findings were:

- teasing, name-calling and bullying (including racial) is common - although one-third of pupils said they hadn't experienced it.
- racial name-calling was the third most common form. Asian pupils suffered more than the other ethnic groups.
- about half the boys and one-third of the girls said they had seen racial fights.
- two-thirds or more had friends in other ethnic groups, but most of their friends were of their own ethnic group.
- 'male youth culture' and a context of inter-communal strife in the locality appeared to be factors in a higher level of racism in one boys school in the study.

- relations between black and white pupils were generally racialised (i.e. seen in stereotyped group terms).
- very few pupils complained to teachers, and many felt that teachers did not respond positively.
- some teachers were seen as racist.

As Kelly says, at school 'being teased and bullied is a common experience' (p12). About two-thirds of all the pupils stated that they had been teased or bullied at school. In fact it is rather surprising that as many as one-third 'consistently and repeatedly stated that they had 'never' been teased or bullied' (p12). The pupils regarded name-calling as the most significant form of teasing or bullying. Kelly says, rightly, that 'It is important to distinguish between the trivial and the serious when it comes to name-calling' (p12). Pupils were asked to list the three names that made them most angry or miserable (see table p16). Racial names numbered 154 out of 2706 possible responses and 1605 actual responses. However, white children were much more unlikely to be called racist names (only 41 citations out of a possible 2706, according to the table on p17). The crucial statistic, which the research unfortunately doesn't state, is how frequently *black* children are called racist names. The research does identify Asian children as being subject to name-calling more than other groups (p13: Asian 66%, 50-52% Afro-Caribbean and English), but it doesn't state if they are called more *racist* names, or just more names in general (though that in itself may be racist). Nor does Kelly explain why Afro-Caribbean children should be subject to a much lower incidence of name-calling



(the same as English) - though the Afro-Caribbean figure may include a large number of racist names, perhaps even as many as the Asian figure.

A major factor limiting the value of the research was its exclusive reliance on written questionnaires. (On p6 Kelly states that 'pupils were encouraged to engage in discussion with the research team once they had completed the questionnaires', but the status of these discussions in the research is unclear, since on p7 she states that 'the research team did not interview pupils', and only once (p14) is reference made elsewhere in the report to these discussions). For example, the fact that the team gave no explanation of the term 'racial' did nothing to dispel the confusion that some of the first year pupils felt about the term (p17). Almost 50% of the possible responses were left blank, and 129 non-racial 'anal + sexual' names were given, compared with 387 racial names.

The picture is no clearer when it deals with the issue of fighting. 49% of pupils said they had seen 'racial fights' at school. There are two problems here. The first is that the research says nothing about the *frequency* of such fights. The fact that almost half the secondary boys she asked claimed to have seen racial fights reveals nothing about how frequent such events are (perhaps only one fight had occurred and been witnessed by half the school). The second is: how do the pupils know the fights are 'racial'? As Kelly recognises, when pupils from different ethnic groups argue, fall out, scrap or compete with each other, their encounters will tend to be seen as 'racial' by other pupils (p20). 52-56% of Asian and Afro-Caribbean pupils reported that other pupils had picked fights with them, as against 44% of English (though only

35% of Chinese). Does the extra 10% or so represent a racist 'levy' additional to the normal incidence of fighting? What proportion of fights involving Black pupils have a racist dimension to them (as against being perceived as such)?

The question of how widespread racial incidents are is taken up again in Kelly's conclusion. 'In thinking about the individuals who may become either 'victims' or 'aggressors' we are, it seems, talking about a small minority' (p27). It is difficult to square this conclusion with the evidence she gives. In terms of aggressors, her research did not investigate how many pupils perpetrated racist name-calling or fights, and it is therefore impossible to base any conclusion on it as to the proportion of pupils involved. In terms of victims, in the cases both of racial name-calling and of racial fights her evidence states that a *majority*, not a small minority, of pupils had experienced it.

Published in the same volume as Kelly's report is a study by Cohn (1988). She investigated name-calling in 3 secondary and 3 primary schools, using questionnaires and small group interviews to elicit the views of 549 pupils aged between 10 and 17. Racist names were the most prevalent, the most varied and regarded as among the worst. She found significant age and gender differences:

- racist name-calling, and how seriously it was perceived, increased with age.
- fewer girls than boys cited racist name-calling, but more girls than boys regarded it as hurtful and serious.

- the strong stance taken by one school against racist harassment made no difference to the amount of name-calling, but a much higher proportion of its pupils said it was hurtful and it mattered.

Unfortunately Cohn doesn't state how many pupils, or how many groups, were of which age, or even how many were primary and how many secondary. Of the interviews she quotes from, one is primary, six are secondary, and one is unattributed.

Cohn asked pupils which names they had been called and/or heard used. She found that of all names cited the racist names were the most prevalent and the most varied. The difference between her findings and those of Kelly (who found that racial names accounted for only 154 out of 1605 responses to the question 'which names make you angry or miserable?') is presumably accounted for by the fact that Kelly only asked pupils which names they had been called, and not which names they had heard other pupils being called.

Kelly and Cohn's studies, together with the CRE and Macdonald reports, were influential in helping to put the issue of racist incidents among children on the education agenda, but their influence reflects the paucity of research in this area rather than the merits of their studies. Judged by the criteria of quantitative research, they have serious limitations. But they also reveal the limitations of a reliance solely on quantitative research methods in this area. The research begins to identify some patterns to the occurrence of racialised behaviour. Their studies reveal little of

what 'race', and therefore racist incidents, *means* to children. Nor, apart from Kelly's finding that boys tended to be involved in racist name-calling and fights more than girls, and Asians more than other groups, do they develop our understanding of the dynamics of racist incidents.

## **RACISM AND GENDER**

An important question is whether there are differences between the behaviour and attitudes of white girls and boys. It may seem an obvious question to ask, particularly in the light of the evidence from numerous studies of children in school that boys are more physical, more aggressive, more competitive in their personal relationships. But the picture with regard to 'race' is not self-evident.

The first point to make is that many of the research studies on racial attitudes and behaviour do not feature gender as a factor. Brown (1984) has a section on the attitudes of white people, including young people, but these are not broken down by gender. Hartmann and Husband (1974) investigated children's attitudes, acknowledge that boys were over-represented in their sample, but regard this as of no significance and again do not break down their responses by gender (p65). Carrington and Short (1989) make no mention of gender, and neither do Cochrane and Billig (1984).

A second category of research studies of attitudes make a brief mention of gender only to record that there are no significant gender differences. Milner (1983) devotes one paragraph to gender, noting that

while the vast majority of studies have involved subjects of both sexes, very few have published any data on sex differences. The reason for this may be less neglect than a reflection of the same situation reported in those studies which have reported data - very few consistent differences by sex in children's racial attitudes. (p117)

Aboud (1988) comes to the same conclusion her brief overview of research evidence (p97): 'reported sex differences are very inconsistent and probably unreliable. Most of the studies reviewed here report no sex differences'.

A third group of studies do identify gender differences in attitudes. Denscombe et al (1986) asked primary children about friendship choices and found that 'any tendency toward ingroup preference is more prevalent among the boys than girls - a point that surely warrants further investigation' (p228). However, the focus of their research was elsewhere and they did not explore this finding. Davey (1983) conducted a major survey of the attitudes of primary age children, and their views are broken down by gender. He found that gender difference was much more significant than ethnic difference as a barrier to friendship choice, but that

Sex-related differences in the children's social perceptions and in the way in which they feel about other groups relative to their own, were less consistent and found to occur only between some groups of boys and girls in conjunction with specific tasks. (p174)

The third category of research studies contains evidence of behaviour rather than attitudes. There is very little evidence of gender differences in terms of racist behaviour, with the exception of the studies by Kelly (1988) and Cohn (1988). Kelly found in the two coeducational secondary schools that there was little difference between the proportions of girls and boys reporting having heard racist name-calling (78% of girls, 76% of boys; p20). This finding conflicts with Cohn's evidence, drawn from primary and secondary pupils, that more boys than girls had heard or been called racist names (boys 41.9%, girls 30.7%; p61. This is the only statistic Cohn produces on gender differences). Kelly found that boys had seen more racial fights than girls (boys 49%, girls 38%; p20). She also found more reported racist name-calling in the all-boys school she studied than in the two mixed schools (84% of boys in the all-boys school, 76% of the boys in the mixed schools). This evidence in on gender differences in relation to racial behaviour is very limited, but it does show a pattern of greater male involvement.

This pattern is congruent with research evidence on harassment in general by children in the literature on bullying. For example, Stephenson and Smith (1989, p46) found that among top juniors about two-thirds of the bullies and the victims were boys. This in turn is part of a broader pattern of aggressive and physical

behaviour by boys in schools that many writers have discussed (see e.g. Askew and Ross 1988).

What tentative conclusions can we come to on the basis of this evidence? First, the fact that the authors of studies which register no or little gender difference think that this finding is not itself significant, given the substantial gender differences in other aspects of children's lives, indicates how gender issues are sometimes taken for granted as unproblematic in work on 'race'.

Secondly, the gender differences that exist in terms of behaviour *do* seem to be reflected, even if more mutedly, in attitude surveys, certainly in the work of Davey, where there is evidence in all the experimental tasks of girls being less ingroup-orientated. It appears that the crucial element that differentiates girls from boys here is the gender-skewed role of the peer group in selecting, amplifying and translating into behaviour certain themes which the culture of children makes available. The outline of the argument is as follows.

The culture of boys is more physical, competitive and aggressive. Boys are culturally more oriented to looser and larger groups, girls to closer groups and dyadic relationships. Horwitz and Rabbie (1982, p262) report an experiment showing that 'Males appeared to be more readily moved than females to perceive themselves as group members'. Unlike females, 'Moving from low to high outgroup salience, males displayed a significant rise in feeling 'a part' of their group and near-significant rises in desiring to associate with own members and to avoid associating

with other members'. The dynamics of culture and group formation interact to increase the salience for boys of ethnic categorisations (i.e. to increase the group boundary strength) and to increase their disposition towards hostile outgroup behaviour. These in turn feed back into attitudes and identity.

This explanation seems to correspond to that of Hewitt (1986, pp17-19, 41-43).

Discussing the ingroup pressure on white boys not to have black friends, he says (pp41-2):

I found no evidence that the location of group identities was effected for girls through the lateral pressure of same-sex peer-groups in the way it was for boys. While girls might be influenced towards racism by their immediate peer group and, in specific ways, by boys, their parents, the media, and other sources, the powerful forms of same-sex peer group pressure, relayed and extended from group to group amongst boys, did not seem to exist for boys. As was suggested earlier, the actual *structure* of girls' peer groups was a significant factor here. The tendency towards smaller primary peer groups and the absence of extensive networks of groups may well have been important in inhibiting the relay of racism amongst girls' groups. It may go some way towards accounting for the fact that expressions of racist attitudes were far less common amongst girls than amongst boys. Certainly the absence of such networks deprived girls of one of the contexts in which racism could be embodied in inter-group *practices*.



There is a further point to make here. The gender differences in peer behaviour described above result in gender differences in ways of using language which may have implications for racial attitudes and behaviour. Askew and Ross (1988) say 'Our observations suggest that there is very little time in school when boys are able to 'rehearse' skills of personal interaction, intimate communication and caring or co-operative behaviour, as girls do' (pp24-5. See also pp35-36). It would seem to follow from this that boys will be less sensitive to individual differences, and therefore more disposed to group categorisation of others, and less able to establish relations on the basis of reciprocity.

## CONCLUSION

The awareness of and concern for racial harassment, including among children, which has been voiced by the black community for many years has more recently found some response on official agendas. However, if policy has lagged behind the urgency of the issue, so too has the development of an understanding of the causes, patterns and meanings of racist behaviour among children. In part this is the product of the dominance of psychological and quantitative models of research in this area. The recent emergence of a literature on bullying has also often neglected the racial dimension. One theme of central importance is the relationship of aggressive behaviour, including racist behaviour, to gender issues, and particularly to the formation of certain masculine identities.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **METHODOLOGY**

The segregation of methodological issues in a separate chapter is analytically convenient, but it is nevertheless artificial if qualitative research is seen as 'a dynamic process [...] which links together problems, theories and methods' (Bryman and Burgess 1994, p2). Some aspects of methodology have been dealt with in previous chapters (for example, the critiques of studies of childrens' attitudes to 'race', of ethnicity and friendship choice), and of quantitative studies of racist name-calling, and this chapter therefore needs to be read in relation to them.

#### **THE RESEARCH SITES AND SAMPLES**

The empirical research which forms the basis of this study was carried out in three primary schools in two neighbouring LEAs in England. Pseudonyms will be used to preserve anonymity. Two schools - Woodshire Primary School and Hillside Junior School - were in Woodshire. The other school is Greenshire Primary School in Greenshire. Both LEAs are shire counties with an ethnic minority population of less than 3%, concentrated mainly in the poorer areas of their towns.

The basis on which the LEAs were selected was governed by demographic, geographical and opportunity factors. The intention was to conduct research in schools, and LEAs, with a relatively low proportion of ethnic minority pupils. There is a need to investigate school contexts in which the ethnic composition of both the school and the locality is predominantly white, but where there is a significant ethnic minority presence. This corresponded to the focus of the research, which was not primarily on the experiences of black children but on the significance of 'race' in the lives of white children in school contexts where they were in a numerical majority but shared their school experiences with black children.

LEAs were approached which satisfied these requirements and were within reasonable geographical access, and permission was sought to conduct the research in schools in their areas. The issue of racist behaviour in schools is a potentially controversial one. Fear of adverse publicity in the popular press, coupled with the slim majority of the party in power, may have been the factors which caused the first LEA which was approached to delay giving a decision for some months. However, two other LEAs gave permission without difficulty for schools in their areas to be contacted, and suggested a number which met the criteria of the project. A number of such schools were visited and the project discussed with headteachers and governors before selecting three schools. The head teachers were told that the focus of the project was on 'race relations' among children, in the wider context of children's peer relationships. The basis of the choice at that stage was the perception of how cooperative the head and the school were likely to be. The decisive factor was the need for unimpeded access to children. That entailed an assurance that I

would have complete freedom to choose which children to interview, when, and how often. Three schools were chosen because that number permitted an intensive study of each school while still providing scope for comparison and generalisation across schools. In return the teachers and the school were guaranteed anonymity.

Woodshire school served a traditional working class district in one of the county's principal towns. Approximately 14% of the pupils came from ethnic minority families. The majority were Asian, mainly Sikhs, with a smaller number from Muslim and Hindu backgrounds. There were a small number of Afro-Caribbean pupils.

Hillside Junior School is in another of the county's larger towns. Of the 175 children in the school about two-thirds came from a traditional working class district similar to that served by Woodshire School. The remainder came from a more middle-class area of the town. The ethnic minority population of the school was about 17%, mainly Muslims with some from other Indian family backgrounds and some of Afro-Caribbean descent.

The third school, Greenshire Primary School, was situated in a new housing estate on the outskirts of the county's largest town. The pupils came from a mixture of social backgrounds, mainly 'upwardly mobile' working class. Of the 223 pupils, some 25% were of Asian background, principally Sikhs. Again, there were a small number of Afro-Caribbean children.

All three schools had policies on racial equality, which included a concern with racist behaviour. There was evidence from the headteachers and from pupils of action being taken when racist incidents had occurred. The headteacher in Greenshire school had adopted a particularly high-profile stance on this issue, perhaps partly in response to the more overt policy stance of Greenshire LEA.

The research focused on children aged 9 to 11 years old. It was carried out in the school year 1989-90. I spent the autumn term of 1989 in Woodshire school, working with a Year 6 class containing 32 children. All of them were white apart from two Asian boys and two Asian girls. I also worked with all the children in the parallel Year 6 class, though less intensively than with the other class, with the exception of a group of four friends, two white and two Afro-Caribbean. Six months later, at the end of the summer term, I returned to the school and conducted further interviews with all the children in the study.

I spent the spring term in Hillside school working with two Year 6 classes: one of 31 children, including three Asian boys and one Asian girl, and the other, which also contained some Year 5 children, including three Asian boys, one Asian girl and one Afro-Caribbean boy.

In the summer term I studied two parallel mixed classes of Year 5 and Year 6 children in Greenshire school. Of the 77 children, 15 were black: 7 Asian girls, 6 Asian boys, and 2 Afro-Caribbean girls.

In total, I studied some 170 Year 5 and Year 6 children, of whom 29 were black (24 of Indian or Pakistani descent, one other South Asian, and 5 Afro-Caribbean). In addition, I interviewed a number of Year 3 and 4 children in the three schools, though reasons of space prevent the findings from this part of the research from being discussed here. A total of 246 interviews were conducted in the three primary schools.

I also carried out a small scale follow-up study of some of the Year 5 and 6 children when they were at secondary school. In September 1991 I interviewed 7 children from Woodshire school, who had all transferred to Woodshire High School, at the beginning of Year 8, two years after I first interviewed them. In July 1992 I interviewed 11 children from Greenshire school at Green High School two years after I had first interviewed them in the primary school. 8 of them were at the end of Year 8, 3 of them were at the end of Year 7. (The classes I had interviewed at Greenshire school contained a mixture of Year 5 and Year 6 children). Access was arranged with the heads of the secondary schools without difficulty.

In the months before beginning the fieldwork in the three primary schools, I carried out a pilot project in two multiracial primary schools, each with a minority of Black pupils, in another LEA. Lack of space precludes reference to this study here, but it proved valuable for three reasons. First, it allowed me to try out a number of the research techniques I subsequently employed. Secondly, it alerted me to many of the key themes that I later identified and analysed in the study of the three schools. And thirdly, there was a striking similarity between the findings in the three schools

and the pilot project, which strengthens their validity. Further confirmation of some of the secondary school findings was provided by interviews I carried out with Asian pupils, unconnected to this study, at another secondary school of similar ethnic composition in 1993, but again space precludes further reference to this study.

## RESEARCH STRATEGIES

A qualitative research perspective was the one most appropriate to the aims of the study. Hammersley (1990) characterises qualitative research in the following way.

(a) People's behaviour is studied in everyday contexts, rather than under experimental conditions created by the researcher.

(b) Data are gathered from a *range* of sources, but observation and/or relatively informal conversations are usually the main ones.

(c) The approach to data collection is 'unstructured' in the sense that it does not involve following through a detailed plan set up at the beginning; nor are the categories used for interpreting what people say and do pre-given or fixed. This does not mean that the research is unsystematic; simply that initially the data are collected in as raw a form, and on as wide a front, as feasible.

(d) The focus is usually a single setting or group, of relatively small scale. In life history research the focus may even be a single individual.

(e) The analysis of the data involves interpretation of the meanings and functions of human actions and mainly takes the form of verbal descriptions and explanations, with quantification and statistical analysis playing a subordinate role at most. (Hammersley 1990, pp1-2)

I employed the following research strategies:

- unstructured interviews
- semi-structured interviews based on: discussions of photographs, poems and stories; group construction and discussion of friendship webs; discussions of transcript extracts from previous discussions; and group construction and discussion of an incident flow-chart
- observation
- diaries kept by children
- sociometric studies of friendship patterns

The principal research method was interviews with children, unstructured or semi-structured, individually or in groups, and it was also by far the most productive strategy I employed. Before discussing it, I will briefly summarise the others.

### **Observation**



I spent the great majority of mid-session and mid-day breaks observing children, mainly in the playground and on the playing-field, but also in classrooms and corridors. I also observed children during some lessons. If the success of this strategy was to be judged by the number of racist incidents I observed, it was a complete failure. This came as no surprise. Racist incidents are rare, and tend to occur out of the sight of teachers and other adults. Nevertheless, observing children, particularly at play, was valuable in a number of respects. It enabled me to become familiar with the children, their relationships and behaviour. Children often talked to me, and this was important in cementing relationships. My presence conveyed the message that I was interested in what they did. While I observed no racist incidents, I saw numerous incidents involving conflict of one sort or another. I also noted patterns of inclusion and exclusion, some of which had a racial dimension.

Early in the project I spent two days shadowing two children, a white boy and an Asian girl, one day each, and writing a commentary on what occurred. The contrast between their days was extreme, particularly during breaktimes. The boy played 'tig' at top speed non-stop, scarcely having the breath to speak. The girl played football in the large game that filled most of the playground. This enabled her to combine running about and trying to kick the ball when it came near with standing and chatting with friends when it had moved away. The shadowing exercise provided systematic confirmation of some significant gender differences I had already noted, but was not sufficiently productive for my purposes, especially in the light of the time it took, and I decided not to continue this strategy.

### **Sociometric studies**

One of the first things I did with each class of children was to ask them, in individual interviews or in group situations but separately and confidentially, to write down the names of the children who they regarded as their 'best friends'. I set no limit to the number, though I made clear that I didn't mean just their one special best friend, if they had one. I also asked them to put down the name of any child that they 'didn't get on with well at all, if there was one', making clear that they didn't have to put anything if they did not want to. On this basis I constructed a sociometric diagram of the class or classes in the year. I drew on this in subsequent discussions in order to explore the characteristics, and their explanations of, particular relationships. The principal source of information about the existence and composition of groups was the children themselves, who described them independently with considerable agreement. This is congruent with the views of Cairns and Cairns (1986, p332), who report that 'one of our most robust findings involved the high consensus among persons in their perceptions of the social structures that exist among peers. In one investigation [...], we found greater than 90% accuracy in agreement among individuals on the composition of social groups in their classes'.

### **Diaries**

I invited several groups of children to keep diaries. The purpose, I suggested, was to record thoughts and incidents concerning their peer relationships. All responded enthusiastically to the idea. The agreement we made was that what they wrote

would be strictly confidential. Within the school situation only I would read it (unless they chose to show it to anyone else), and I would not refer to anything they wrote in talking with other children without their permission. In practice, the use to which the children put the diary opportunity varied considerably. Some wrote a great deal, and told me of writing it at night in bed under the covers. Others wrote little. Some simply recorded daily events that were of little interest to my research. There was a significant gender difference here. In general, the girls' diaries were much more articulate, personal and perceptive. For example, at Woodshire school Stacey recorded at breathless length the shifting kaleidoscope of relationships and incidents among the large group of girls she belonged to, and Nina used her diary to express a repeated cry from the heart about her own unhappiness at having no real friends. In contrast, the boys wrote less, and in many cases the subject matter largely concerned football.

I could have made more use of the diary strategy, by involving all the children and for the whole duration of the research. I chose not to do so for two reasons, both stemming from the difficulty many children had, even with the best of intentions, in writing up their diaries regularly. My monitoring of their progress and exhortations to keep up to date inevitably tended to put me into something like the teacher role I was at pains to avoid. And my solution to the problem, which was to give them time to write up their diaries during the sessions they were with me, reduced the time available for interviews. In spite of the value of the diary strategy, I felt the time was better used in discussions.

## UNSTRUCTURED AND SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

The choice of unstructured interviews as my principal research strategy derived from the nature of the research task. As Helen Simons puts it, 'whereas structured questions are appropriate when you know what you want to find out, unstructured questions are preferable when you are not sure what you want to know but are prepared to depend on your capacity to recognise significant data on appearance' (Simons 1981, p28). Of course, I did have an agenda of general topics which I wished to pursue, though not in any particular linear way, and each interview threw up lines of enquiry that I wanted to follow. But the research situation as well as the research task also dictated primarily an 'unstructured' approach. The more the children perceived me to be imposing my own agenda on the discussion, the more the situation corresponded to their experiences of talking with teachers, with the negative consequences that I have already mentioned.

Adelman, noting that one problem with using talk lies in its familiarity, its 'ordinariness', says that 'To be capable of using talk as a means of research the researcher has both to maintain rapport with the subject by the ordinary means of conversation (intonation, emphasis, non-verbal gestures) and yet, at the same time, remain uninvolved in terms of empathy with the account that is being given' (Adelman 1981, p4). Adelman's formulation needs to be questioned. I would endorse the necessity for critical monitoring and analysis of the account as it unfolds (as well as in subsequent analysis). But that is not incompatible with 'understanding and sympathy for the informant's point of view', which Burgess (1982, p108) regards

as vital. Signalling empathy, through feedback remarks, facial expressions and body language, is a crucial research tool, part of the process of establishing and maintaining a positive relationship.

All the interviews were taped. The advantages of a verbatim record are obvious. The potential disadvantage is that the presence of a cassette recorder might have a negative effect on the interview situation. This was rarely the case. I was initially surprised at how readily children accepted that our discussions were taped, and how quickly a routine was established in which the cassette recorder was taken for granted.

#### **Stories, poems and photographs**

With some groups of children, I used stories and poems as a stimulus and focus for semi-structured discussion. (The main texts were: *Playground*, by Michael Rosen; *Taller Than Before*, by Bernard Ashley; and *Sticks and Stones*, anonymous). Their success was limited. Although their comments often demonstrated insight in understanding the texts, it was notable that the most productive parts of the sessions were not their responses to the texts themselves but those occasions when the texts served as a stimulus for them to discuss their own experiences and ideas. In general, the text-based discussions were less productive than our unstructured interviews. There were three reasons for this. The first was that the children were, in general, understandably more interested in, and more perceptive about, their own personal experiences rather than literary ones. Secondly, the use of texts changed the nature

of the research situation. It brought it much closer to what they were familiar with in school, a *teaching* situation, in terms both of the content and the role that they perceived me as playing. And thirdly, the subject matter of the texts concerned racial prejudice discrimination, and alerted the children's attention to what they could perceive as my 'real' agenda, for which my general interest in their lives was merely camouflage.

My use of photographs with several groups was subject to the same constraints, apart from not focusing specifically on issues of 'race'. These were not photographs of the children themselves (a strategy used by, for example, Cohen 1989) but a pack of photographs of children of approximately their age published by a teachers' centre and commonly used as a basis for discussion in schools. They are excellent for teaching purposes, but their use tended to have a negative effect on the nature of the research situation.

### **Semi-structured 'workshops'**

On several occasions my discussion with a group of children was structured by a collective task based on analysing their own experiences. I will briefly describe the two most extended examples. One was the analysis by the principal participants of an incident at Woodshire school involving racist taunts. We worked together in a number of sessions constructing a flow-chart of the series of events that made up this episode. I deal with this in detail in chapter 10 as a case-study under the heading 'The Salman Rushdie Incident' and I will not duplicate it here. The other is not

referred to elsewhere. A discussion with a group of children at Greenshore school about individuals and relationships within the two parallel mixed Year 5 and 6 classes led to the group constructing large charts of friendship patterns and personal characteristics. This was very illuminating for me in providing a basis of understanding of the topography of the two classes of children, and I used the same technique with a number of groups of children.

Both activities were very successful. The reasons for their success reinforce by contrast my evaluation of the group discussions of texts and photographs. The key difference is that both activities arose naturally out of ongoing discussions of their own situations. Because they had both the enthusiasm that that evoked, and the relevant social knowledge, they led the activity. My role was as facilitator and learner, not 'teacher'. It is significant that both activities lasted a long time: the Salman Rushdie incident flow-chart took several hours spread over three meetings; the friendship charts took virtually a whole school day of continuous discussion.

### **SAMPLING**

I began by interviewing all the children in the classes selected for the research. This first phase of interviewing took place in groups of three or four children, principally in order to provide a less inhibiting situation for our first discussion. Groups also have other advantages: they permit dialogue among the participants which is free of the constraints of single child-interviewer conversation, and the emergence of a rich cumulative collective narrative (Lewis 1992; Burgess 1984). The groups were

where possible self-selected: generally groups of friends (as Lewis 1992 recommends). In the second phase of interviewing, I talked to all the children individually. This also has advantages. It enables the child and interviewer to pursue one line of thought without interruption or distraction, and it allows children to say things which they would be unwilling to express in front of other children. (Lewis 1992, p414, states that 'Group interviews produce statements which are in line with group norms to a much greater extent than will happen in individual situations). The combination of group and individual discussions proved particularly fruitful.

During these two phases of interviews a number of themes or issues, and a number of significant incidents, had begun to emerge. In the third phase of interviewing I followed a combination of sampling strategies (Burgess 1984). I employed 'judgement sampling', choosing children because of particular attributes or experience. The two main characteristics here were ethnicity - I was concerned to gain a full picture of the experiences of black children - and involvement in significant incidents, usually of conflict between children, sometimes of a racist nature. I also employed 'opportunistic sampling', selecting those children who were particularly valuable as 'key informants' because of their willingness to talk to me, their social awareness and their articulateness. Where possible I used 'snowball sampling': when a child spoke to me of a significant incident I followed it up by talking to other children involved in it, sometimes following a chain of informants. In all, then, the pupils comprised a series of critical case-studies, yielding data which has implications beyond their own experiences.



## THE RESEARCHER ROLE

Ball (1985) points out that the option available to researchers in many areas of ethnographic research of passing themselves as those who are the subjects of the research is not open to those studying pupils in schools. If the pupil role is not available, another option available to those researching in schools is to take on a teacher role. However, there are major disadvantages in doing so as far as children are concerned. The teacher-child relationship is one which, in terms of the power-relationship embodied in it, and the expectations it is likely to evoke in the child of how she or he should behave - expectations centering on the notion of the 'pupil' - will tend to prevent access to the sort of data that is being sought. For example, it may discourage the establishing of a relationship of trust between the child and the researcher, on the grounds that the frank expression of certain views, or the reporting of certain events, may get the child into trouble (Corrigan 1979). This is particularly important, from the point of view both of the ethical problems that are posed for the researcher and for the character of the researcher-respondent relationship, given Measor's (1985) stress on the idea that 'the quality of the data is dependent on the quality of the relationships you build with the people being interviewed' (p57).

I had two principal concerns in my presentation of my role to the children. The first was to establish that I was not there as a teacher. The second was to make clear that I was interested in all aspects of their lives together as children, not specifically or particularly the issue of 'race'. My explanation to them was that I was writing a book about children and their relationships with each other. This was accepted by the

children, who were in general enthusiastic about the idea that they might feature in a book.

I adopted a number of strategies to construct my chosen researcher role and relationship with the children. I avoided behaving in ways which were defining of the teacher's role. I did not try to teach them anything. I did not attempt to 'discipline' them in any way, by reacting critically to things they said or did, either in interview situations or in everyday life in school, which might have transgressed the 'official order' of the school. This raised a number of ethical questions which I will return to later. The question of 'territory' is important. Almost all my research took place outside the classroom context. Most of my interviews took place, in all three schools, in small rooms set aside for the purpose (a medical room, a 'quiet room'). I avoided as much as possible conducting interviews in staff rooms and elsewhere on 'teachers' territory'. I spent the bulk of breaktimes observing children, mainly in the playground, and deliberately limited my association with teachers at those times. I spent some time observing children in the classroom, and showed interest in their work when invited, while resisting the temptation to slip into teaching.

Primary schools were familiar settings for me. I had been teaching in primary schools before beginning the research project, I had read about primary schools, and of course I had been a pupil in a primary school myself. Though that was many years ago, the experience of seeing primary school life through the eyes of children brought back to me many memories of my own childhood experiences. There are both advantages and disadvantages in being familiar with the research setting

(Hockey 1993; Burgess 1985). It can be argued that the 'stranger' role is more conducive to gaining insights and to being objective (see for example Merton, quoted in Burgess 1985, p23). However, it is also maintained that the 'insider' role allows access to and the ability to interpret data, for example, the cultural understandings of respondents, from which 'outsiders' would be excluded. I attempted to take advantage of both positions. While I was not an 'insider' in the three schools in the study, in that I had not previously worked in them as a teacher, my experience of other primary schools had sensitised me to aspects of children's cultures, and had provided me with social skills of relating to children. It also enabled me to 'manage' my relationships with teachers successfully: for example, it provided me with a degree of prior sensitivity to their typical concerns, enabling me to avoid potential pitfalls. But equally, my relationship to the children in the three schools was not one of teacher to pupil. My main initial concern was to see and understand their world from their point of view, and to separate that out and maintain its autonomy from the conceptual frameworks deriving from my own previous experiences, reading and thinking. In that sense I consciously imaginatively identified with the 'stranger'.

I did not research into the teachers in the three schools. (There was one exception: towards the end of my stay in Woodshire school, I interviewed the class teacher. My colleague Barry Troyna conducted the interviews with the headteachers, and with LEA officers, and they are not relevant to this thesis). The focus of the research was on children's cultures, not on school policy and practice. There were occasions when children referred to a specific event - something taught in a lesson, or raised

by the head in assembly, perhaps, or a teacher's involvement in a racist incident - when another perspective could have been provided by the teachers concerned. On some occasions I checked some factual points with them, but in general I did not, for two reasons. Firstly, it might have put at risk the trust and confidentiality on which my relationship with the children was based. The more I discussed with teachers issues and events brought to my notice by children, the greater was the danger that the teachers would themselves raise them with children, creating a barrier to future disclosures to me by children. Secondly, it might have threatened the cooperation I was dependent upon from the teachers to allow me free access to children. Many of the references children made about teachers were critical. In any case, some of the teachers would see my presence in the school, and certainly my questioning them about something as contentious as issues of racism, as a potential threat. I had some experience of this with two teachers of younger children at Hillside school, and with one of the teachers at Woodshire school, which confirmed for me that I had made the right decision.

#### **GENDER, 'RACE', AGE**

There is a debate around the issue of 'symmetry' between researcher and subjects. In Britain the debate is especially pertinent in relation to the study of black people by white researchers (Troyna and Carrington 1989). Two elements of this critique are relevant to my research. The first is whether white researchers can elicit valid data from black respondents. It has been suggested that this might be inhibited or distorted by the unequal power-relationship between them, and/or by differences in

cultural frames of reference and life-experiences (see Rhodes 1994 for an overview of the literature). However, Rhodes found in his research, using both black and white interviewers and black respondents, that his status as a white researcher was not an obstacle, and in certain respects being an 'outsider' was an advantage. In terms of my own research, I would make a number of points in response. First, the circumstances of the project excluded the possibility that black researchers (of appropriate ethnic backgrounds) could have interviewed the black children. A comparison of the data they collected and that gained from my interviews, as a white researcher, might have been instructive, though it would still be difficult to isolate the effect of ethnic symmetry as a factor as against other variables, including gender, age, class and personality factors (Rhodes 1994). Secondly, the majority of the black children in my research did talk to me about their experiences of racism and their opinions about it; some at length and in detail. These were children who were aware in varying ways of their ethnic identities and the social significance of them. A case in point is Yvette, the most aware and militant of all the black children I talked to, and the one who spoke to me most frankly and at greatest length about 'race'. Her willingness to do so stemmed from her assessment that I was sympathetic and could be trusted. Her assessment was based on a number of factors: the very fact that I was interested in learning about 'race' in children's lives; that I was prepared to listen to her; that I never criticised her; that I signalled explicitly to her my own view that racism was important and that I was opposed to it; and that I respected her confidentiality. These factors overrode the possible inhibitions that my ethnicity might have caused.

The second criticism concerns not the eliciting of data but its interpretation. Several black writers have argued that white researchers, and the research paradigm in general, have employed ethnocentric conceptual frameworks which generate policy perspectives which do little, if anything, to challenge racial inequalities (e.g. CCCS 1982). I agree with this argument, but its basis is not an essentialist notion of ethnicity but the social and political standpoint that some white researchers have adopted, and have been criticised for by other writers, white as well as black. I would defend the perspective and conclusions of this research on those grounds. Having said that, they do not depend upon a particularly elaborated or contentious interpretation of black experiences. The focus of the study is on white children, not black, and my interpretive analysis of the experiences of black children is limited to establishing the extent of their experiences of racism, the significance it has for them, and what explanations they offer for it.

A similar case can be made in terms of gender (Riddell 1989; Mac an Ghail 1994). In terms of my research, to what extent was my ability to elicit data from girls, and to interpret it, limited by my status as a male researcher? Again, as Lyn Davies says, 'It would be impossible to state with certainty [...] the specific effect of gender on any research relationship; all one can ask for again is that it might be borne in mind in planning and execution' (1985, p87). Davies also suggests (as does Rhodes 1994) that, as a 'cultural stranger', researchers of the opposite sex from their respondents may be better placed to 'make the familiar strange'.

I do not feel that gender difference inhibited the elicitation of data from girls in my research. To make a generalisation to which there were significant exceptions, girls were more responsive in discussion than boys. The amount and quality of their interview data were greater. This itself was the product of gender processes of masculine identity formation which tended to make some boys less articulate about personal concerns. (It is interesting to speculate whether a female interviewer might have been more successful with these boys than a male one). Furthermore, girls were willing to talk to me quite frankly about personal concerns central to their identities as females. There are two cases in point: their willingness to discuss their 'romance relationships', including their personal feelings; and the point that several girls made about boys taunting them about periods. Again, I would suggest that the main determining factors was not gender asymmetry but the quality of the relationships I established, characterised by a willingness to listen, to take their views and concerns as girls seriously, and to make clear my empathy with them.

The explanation for the tendency for boys to be less articulate about personal issues is unclear. Skevington (1989) suggests that women are both more aware of and more articulate about the affective aspects of social life. I was unable to determine whether those boys in my study who were particularly unforthcoming about personal concerns were so because they were less reflective and analytical about them, or because they were more inhibited about discussing them, or both. It is an issue that needs further research.

There was one aspect of the relationship between me as researcher and the children which was more significant than gender and ethnicity. I was an adult in my forties, they were nine, ten or eleven years old (and in the secondary school, thirteen and fourteen). I was clearly in a position of power within the school situation. While not a teacher, I apparently had the authority to move and act in certain ways within the school situation, including the ability to secure their release from lessons in order to talk to me. My self-presentation as a writer conferred status on me. Furthermore, other factors, such as my accent and appearance, signalled a particular social status in terms of social class and level of education. All of these were markers of the social distance between us.

Chisholm (1990) notes that 'the cohort of youth researchers itself is steadily ageing' (p34) and that current research funding constraints mean that there are few new younger researchers emerging in this area. She rightly points out that intersubjectivity, partly as a product of the relative youth of that cohort of youth researchers, was an important methodological precondition of their research (though she rejects the view that only young people can effectively do youth research). I am doubtful if a similar argument applies to research with children (partly because of the different constraints imposed by age on participant observation). To some extent it is a matter of speculation. For instance, I do not know of any research evidence which might clarify whether a young researcher, dressed informally, and speaking with the appropriate local accent, might have established more fruitful relationships with the children than I did. I can only point to the quality of the data I was able to elicit. I think the decisive factor was not the age and status difference but my ability



to distance myself from the two adult authority roles they were most familiar with, the teacher role and the parent role, and to establish a hospitable personal relationship. Indeed, in that context it is possible to argue that the age gap is a positive factor. There is a certain set of role expectations with which children are familiar from books, television and films, of an older adult who is neither teacher nor parent, and whose rejection of those authority roles permits a close and more egalitarian and communicative relationship with children.

Certainly one of the striking features of my discussions with children was that for the large majority of them I was the only adult they had ever discussed such matters with. It was a source of dissatisfaction expressed by a number of children that there was no opportunity to discuss personal concerns within the curriculum in two of the primary schools. In the third, Greenshire, there was some opportunity: one teacher had initiated some 'personal and social education' sessions. Only a handful of children spoke of having similar discussions with parents; some expressed horror at the idea. For children, privacy is necessary to protect their personal lives from the intervention of powerful adults (Ball 1985).

(I can offer some personal confirmation here. During the project I interviewed, and taped, my own daughter, who was 11 at the time. She spoke very frankly and at length about peer relationships and events at school of deep personal significance to her, of which I had previously known nothing. We had never talked together in that way before, and I would be reluctant to do so again, unless she had a particular

problem she wanted me to help with, because I would not want, as her parent, to intrude on those aspects of her personal life).

### **SOME ETHICAL QUESTIONS**

Denscombe and Aubrook (1992) point out that research carried out in schools, whatever the personal relationship between the researcher and the pupils, are still inscribed within institutional power relationships. My relationship with the children, though different from that of teacher or parent, was still imbued with power in a number of ways: my status as an adult, my status within the school situation, my greater (in general) social knowledge, skills and articulateness, and the fact that I had initiated and was in control of the situations in which we met. I was conscious of the need to ensure that I did not use my power to pressure children into talking against their will. Firstly, I made clear that they could choose not to enter into the interview situation. Though no child exercised this option, I hope it was a real one for them. (When I first talked to Yvette on her own about racism, an issue about which she felt very strongly, she asked if we could stop the discussion and continue it with Natasha, her close black friend, present, and we did). Secondly, the relative lack of articulateness of some children may have been due in part to their uncomfortableness with the interview situation, and I tried to avoid abusing my position of power by putting pressure on those children to speak. Thirdly, there were a number of occasions when I judged that children who were otherwise articulate respondents were becoming upset, and I chose to stop that line of discussion. For example, one boy became upset when talking about his father, who

had died. I wanted to know if he talked to his friends about personal issues like that, but I decided not to pursue the issue. Nevertheless, Denscombe and Aubrook's reminder remains salutary: the power relationship between the children and me was very asymmetrical, though its effects are difficult to estimate. It may be the case, for instance, that the unresponsiveness of some boys about personal issues may be because they regarded my questions as an invasion of privacy but felt obliged to cooperate with the interview request.

The question of power arose not just over specific issues in discussion but over the issue of 'race' in general. To what extent was I justified in alerting children to issues of which they were not aware, and which could then be a source of unhappiness to them? As a teacher I would be prepared to take the responsibility of raising an issue of racism with black children, even if they were not hitherto aware of it, and justify it on educational grounds, but only in a pedagogic context in which the issue could be worked through with children so that the learning outcomes were positive rather than negative. But a researcher is not a teacher and it would be morally irresponsible to unleash issues without the pedagogic conditions for managing them. I tried to avoid this problem in a number of ways: by monitoring children's reactions carefully during our discussions, by building on what they were already aware of, and sometimes by choosing to pose issues impersonally if I felt that the personal mode might be too sensitive. In general the problem did not arise, because the black children were already aware of racism as a phenomenon and were willing to talk about it. There was one occasion however when I retreated from a line I was pursuing. I was talking to Clare, an Afro-Caribbean girl, about white boyfriends and

racism. It was an issue that other black children had discussed with me freely and personally, but I sensed as we talked that for Clare the idea that white boys might not want to go out with her because she was black could be a new and upsetting idea, and I changed the subject.

## THE PRESENTATION OF DATA

I have quoted extensively from my interview data in this thesis. There are a number of reasons for doing so. Firstly, I share Woods' approach to the presentation of research findings.

I use extensive quotation - the subjects do a great deal of speaking for themselves. The themes are theirs, the categories are theirs. [...] These member typifications are then subjected to social and scientific analysis. They are two distinct processes, and ideally should not be confused. The 'rhetoric of interaction' should not be coloured by the analysis, and should be available for alternative analyses. (1981, p24)

This approach contrasts with that of the classic 'grounded theory' method which, as Richards and Richards (1994) argue, 'jettisons data'. Once the data have been coded, 'The subsequent process of theory construction is at a distance from original data, consisting instead of 'ordering sets of already discovered cognitions and propositions into logically consistent constructions' (p150). In contrast, Richards and Richards base themselves on two premises, .

both foreign to the grounded theory approach. One is data conservation; *nothing* is to be jettisoned if it might later be useful. The other is a particular approach to theory testing, the ability to produce *all* the evidence to validate claims about it. (p150)

Rudduck (1993) gives two additional important reasons for using extensive quotations from interviews. First, 'I respect the power of the direct quotation to capture succinctly and vividly what could only be expressed dully and less economically in the researcher's own words' (p19). (A case in point is how Simon, a boy at Hillside school, summed up how he saw the morality of telling the teacher about the misdemeanours of others: 'Grass will be grassed'). Secondly, in her view direct quotation signals respect for those voices which are often marginalised in educational discourse applies *a fortiori* to children.

The use of extensive quotations does not however signify that the aims of my research are satisfied by the identification and presentation of children's own meanings. Silverman (1993) comments on the tendency within qualitative research to limit its aim to that of empathising with people and being the mirror of other people's 'experiences' (p ix). This is the bias evinced by a number of studies of children's cultures: for example, the 'ethogenic perspective' adopted by Davies (1982). Going beyond qualitative research as simply the re-presentation of experience raises two fundamental (and related) issues: the question of validity and the question of theory-building.

## **VALIDITY**

A fundamental methodological issue within qualitative research is the status of, or claimed for, interview data (Silverman 1993). Following Cicourel (1984), Hammersley and Atkinson (1983, p107) insist that 'accounts are not simply representations of the world; they are part of the world they describe'. However, an awareness of interviews as social situations in their own right, and a recognition that the narratives they generate can illuminate the nature and sources of the frames of reference used by respondents, should not be counterposed to, or substitute for, an evaluation of the accuracy, that is the truth or falsity, of accounts. Van Dijk's (1987) research into accounts of 'race' is a case in point: his analyses of how 'race' is constructed in accounts is given its force by the fact that people do discriminate on racist grounds in practice as well as in discourse.

### **The reliability of children's reports**

My research was largely reliant on interview data. Parker and Gottman (1988) point out that

much of what is known about friendship interaction is known through interviews and questionnaires [...]. This is especially true of middle childhood and adolescent friendships. Asking children about their friendship interaction can be a valuable method of obtaining data on children's expectancies for friendships and their beliefs about their

friendship interactions. But interviews and questionnaires cannot substitute for observation if one's aim is to describe actual friendship interaction [...]. There are two particular difficulties with the interview/questionnaire approach. First, self-report measures are dependent on such factors as verbal fluency and cognitive capacity, which can place some children, especially young children, at a distinct disadvantage when they are asked what they do with friends. It often happens that what they can actually do is far more sophisticated than what one would predict on the basis of their self-reports. [...]

Second, even if children have the requisite verbal and cognitive skills to accurately articulate their actions, children, like adults, are not always aware of their actions [...], nor do they always behave as they believe.  
(p97)

Erwin (1992), discussing the reliance of analyses of relationship problems on personal retrospective accounts, issues a salutary caution.

Although a child's account of his or her relationship problems is of interest, and indeed must be taken into account in any counselling, it is not necessarily the same as the actual causes. All such accounts are interpreted explanation of what has happened and, in very young children especially, they are limited by the child's cognitive and verbal abilities. Add to this the distortions of memory which accrue over time

and it can be seen that these are far from reliable sources of evidence.

(p217)

I would respond to these concerns by making several points. First, most of the children I interviewed were quite articulate about their own relationships, indeed in some cases they showed remarkable insight. In general therefore, this was not the problem that it would be with younger children. The question remains of how accurate such accounts were. The principal solution of qualitative research to this problem is the notion of triangulation. One type of triangulation involves addressing the same research issue by means of different research methods. So, for example, Denscombe and Aubrook (1992), in a study of drug use among secondary school students, regard their questionnaire self-reports as accurate on the grounds that the responses were consistent with interview responses, as well as with research data from other studies. In my research, the interview findings received general confirmation from the evidence from children's diaries and my own observations, although the value of the latter was limited. The sort of significant incidents revealed to me in interviews were seldom observed, mainly because of probability factors. (Parker and Gottman's reference, above, to the value of observation was in semi-experimental situations with younger children).

Another type of triangulation refers to the interrelationship of accounts by different respondents. It is on this that my justification of the validity of my interview findings is based. Because I interviewed every member of my sample populations at length at least once, and in many cases more than once, I was able to assemble a



cumulative picture of their shared social world. As far as possible I cross-checked each account of a significant incident with other participants and observers. These multiple perspectives provided mutual confirmations, qualifications and disconfirmations, building up a dense three-dimensional web of social understanding.

### **Saying what they think you want**

A problem with the elicitation of respondents' views, whether by interview or questionnaire, is that responses may be tailored to what the respondents believe is expected or wanted by the researcher (Cohen 1988). Davies (1982) deals with it at length. She points out that 'cue-seeking' is inherent in the teacher-pupil relationship, and may be carried over into the researcher-child relationship. She gives as an example a child who 'switches to looking for what I want because I inadvertently cue her that her answer is not acceptable' (p33). Davies' solution to the problem lies in the establishment of what she calls the 'We-relationship', based on mutual reciprocity of trust. In Davies' view, the children then become 'so engrossed in examination of the problem at hand that the researcher's consciousness (and what she wants) are a taken-for-granted background to the conversation' (p57).

While it is true that the creation of a trusting personal relationship may well minimise the problem, it is methodologically naive to rely on it and to attempt to justify it theoretically. The problem is posed particularly sharply over issues such as racism. The phenomenon of denying holding racist views which has been dissected

by van Dijk (1987) is particularly pertinent to the school situation, where children have expectations, often reinforced by the application of sanctions, that adults in the school milieu will find the expression of racist views unacceptable. The creation of a personal relationship with the researcher may remove the threat of sanction by the official school order, but it may also both reveal more fully the researcher's own views and substitute for the threat of official sanction the fear of loss of the researcher's personal approval.

I attempted to preempt this in my discussions with white children by minimising the clues I offered as to what answers might be perceived as gaining my approval. In this respect my discussions with children were markedly different from ordinary conversations. With white children I avoided making any statements of my own views on controversial issues, especially on issues of 'race'. My approach was similar to that followed by Woods (1981) in interviewing a headteacher: 'I did as little talking as I could get away with, being intent, as Cicourel advises, on elaborating his meaning' (p17). I also avoided offering negative feedback, in language or facial expressions, to the expression of racist views. In this respect my approach contrasts with that of Cohen (1988), who signalled his disapproval of racist utterances by stopping the discussion and switching to an antiracist teaching role. Cohen does not comment on the likely consequences this might have had for the views that the respondents subsequently expressed.

The approach I adopted raises an important ethical question concerning the relationship between research into racism and antiracist practice. Woods (1981), for

instance, says that even the act of listening in some way legitimates, or at least may be perceived as legitimating, racist views. One perspective on this issue centres on the notion of research as transformative practice within the research situation itself. Troyna and Carrington (1989), for example, recommend a collaborative, action-research model as a basis for future research on 'race'. However, there are research situations where that is not a feasible model, because to attempt to change the practices of respondents would undermine or foreclose on the research project itself. The investigation of racist attitudes and behaviour is such a situation. The ethical justification for appearing to accept the expression of racist views is that their possible legitimization within the research situation is outweighed by the general transformative potential of the research findings once published.

#### **DATA AND THEORY**

The second fundamental issue which is raised once one goes beyond what Mills called the 'abstracted empiricism' of descriptive qualitative research is that of theory-building. It is an ongoing debate in the domain of educational research. Woods (1985), for example, argues that ethnographic research in education has been largely descriptive and has been weak in terms of the generation and formulation of theory. Hammersley, Scarth and Webb (1985) note the problematic status of theory in ethnographic research, partly in reaction to what are seen as over-deterministic sociological approaches, and partly a wish to privilege the validity of participants' own accounts, perhaps even above critical commentary on them. To engage fully with that debate is beyond the scope of this thesis. But I do want to at least outline

how I would locate my own approach in this study, from a methodological point of view, to the relationship of theory to data.

I will begin by characterising its relationship to 'grounded theory' (Strauss 1987), because it has been a particularly influential perspective within qualitative research, as an approach to generating theory from data (though Bryman and Burgess suggest that 'it is probably given lip-service to a greater degree than is appreciated' (1994, p6)). Burgess (1984, p181) refers to a number of criticisms that have been raised concerning the status of theory in 'grounded theory' and its relationship to data, and questions whether it consists of anything more than properties, categories, and hypotheses. This contrasts with Layder's concept of theories as more elaborated 'networks' or 'integrated clusterings' of concepts, propositions and 'world-views' with a more abstract dimension than is allowed by 'grounded theory' (1983, p15).

I argue that in any research project there *should be* room for more qualitative, open-ended forms of theory (rather than ones that narrowly specify the relations between precisely measurable variables). [...] I think dialogue can be achieved by actually trying to specify the nature of the links between the seemingly more remote and abstract forms of theorizing [...] and the actual practice of research and the formulation of research projects. (Layder 1993, p15)

Layder criticises 'grounded theory' for suggesting (Strauss 1987) that macro or structural elements can be brought in simply as a matter of convenience or emphasis, because of its

extreme emphasis on grasping the emergent nature of meaning in the milieu that is being researched, and the insistence that grounded theory should 'fit' and be relevant to the people to whom it refers. Such an emphasis underlines the unsuitability of objective, scientific concepts as an important means of capturing everyday experience in sociological terms. (p54)

In particular, 'grounded theory' neglects and is unsympathetic to structural concepts. 'These prohibitions on the use of structural concepts need to be amended. In particular, it needs to be assumed that structural features are inextricably interlocked with social activities and we cannot understand the one without the other' (Layder 1993, p56). This is certainly the approach I have taken, in attempting to locate the social processes of children's cultures within wider social contexts, particularly that of 'race'. In that regard, I now want to refer briefly to the debate around the place of structural concepts in qualitative research.

It has been posed most sharply in terms of the relationship between ethnography and marxism. This is particularly relevant to my research perspective because concepts from a number of marxist writers - Hall, Miles, Therborn, and above all Gramsci - provide the overall theoretical framework within which my analysis is situated.

West (1984) has criticised some marxist ethnography, in particular Willis's *Learning to Labour* (1977), for a failure to integrate sufficiently the theoretical explanation with the ethnographic data. Andy Hargreaves (1985), rejecting the twin opposite errors of empiricism and theoreticism, insists that 'Empirical work of high quality consists of a continuing *dialogue* between theory and evidence where each is continually interrogated against the other *as well as* being tested for its internal consistency and coherence' (p28). What is required is a theoretical perspective that is capable of engaging with different levels of analysis, from the fine-grain of the micro level to 'grand theory'.

A development and filling-out of Hargreaves' conception is provided by Layder's (1993) 'realist' approach. Layder employs a 'layered' model comprising four elements: context, setting, situated activity, self. Elsewhere, I have utilised a more complex model, based on the same principles, in analysing racist incidents, and although it is not replicated here (see Troyna and Hatcher 1991), it informs the analyses within this study. Layder speaks of the value of concepts which can serve as a two-sided 'conceptual tool which can straddle both sides of the macro-micro division and thus can potentially be a force working to secure their eventual synthesis', integrating the objective and the subjective, the interactional and the institutional (p131). In my research, that crucial function is served in particular by the Gramscian concepts of 'culture' and 'ideology', and the concepts associated with or derived from them: for instance, the concept of 'common sense'.

It is at this point that the two crucial methodological issues of generalisability and theory-building in qualitative research come together. Silverman (1993, p160) expresses the relationship as follows:

It is important to recognise that generalising from cases to populations does not follow a purely statistical logic in field research. Quoting Mitchell (1983), Bryman thus argues that: 'the issue should be couched in terms of the generalisability of cases to to *theoretical* propositions rather than to *populationms* or universes' (1988, 90, my emphasis).

In terms of my own research, its claim to be more than a 'local accomplishment' rests not simply on its generalisability to other schools and peer cultures on the grounds of similarity, but on the findings sustaining a conceptual framework which can be fruitfully brought to bear on a varied range of research situations.

## CHAPTER 7

### CHILDREN'S CULTURES

An understanding of the cultures and relationships of the children at the three schools in this study provides the necessary context for focusing on issues of 'race'. Issues other than those of 'race' were the subject of much of the discussions which took place with children.

Chapter 2 was devoted to the analysis of conflict as central to children's relationships, including their relations with friends. The research evidence is confirmed by the findings of this study. Conflict was often non-aggressive, and often an enjoyable element of children's interaction. The children were unanimous in stating that the most common aggressive form that it took was name-calling. Philip's answer, when asked what was the worst thing that friends could do, was typical: 'I think calling somebody is the worst'. As will be shown in the next chapter, by far the most salient form that racism took in the three schools was racist name-calling. For those reasons, this chapter begins with the issue of name-calling, which will illustrate something of the wider processes of conflict, power and ideology that informed children's relationships.



## NAME-CALLING AMONG CHILDREN

Name-calling is used here as a broad term to include both the use of negative epithets and the use of other linguistic forms having similar functions. Name-calling was a common interaction strategy used by the children. This description by three boys at Greenshire school, Martin, Anthony and Neil, gives a typical picture. Anthony said that he got picked on sometimes because he was small and Neil got picked on because he was tall.

N: And I've got my speaking problems. I had to go to have speech therapy. I spit when I talk. I get picked on because of that as well.

A: People call him 'Spit the Dog'. I get used to it because if he's talking to you and he spits on your work or something you tend to just move out the way, it doesn't bother you, whereas most people just call him names and stuff.

They were asked if other children got picked on.

A: Katy and Deborah.

RH: Why Katy?

A: Because she's plump. People call her 'Fatso' now.

M: I was getting on with my work and she calls me a 'Fat Elephant' and I never said nothing and Ross goes 'You can talk' and making fun of her.

A: They make fun of Christopher because he's got chubby legs. Most of that is muscle.

RH: Why Deborah?

N: Because she hangs around with Michelle.

A: And Rachel gets picked on because she's tall.

N: We call her 'Lanky Grandma'.

M: When we were playing a game of football Deborah got the ball and Ross, before the ball came to her he was blowing it, because they keep on saying she's got fleas.

A: And Robert gets picked on because of his lips.

N: He's got big lips.

M: They call him 'Rubber lips'.

RH: Do you think everybody gets picked on for something?

All: Yes.

N: Like some people get picked on because they've got a rubbish watch or something. Like I used to have one of these... [*he named a type of watch*]. Now it was pretty good and nobody picked on me about that but when I got this new one nobody liked it and when Johan got one before me...

A: Everybody thought it was wicked because it was the first one they had seen it.

N: When I got mine people thought it was rubbish because I had it.

A: Nicholas gets picked on. He's got his little briefcase, he's brainy and he's got wicked thin legs - well Anthony has got thin legs - and we call him 'matchstick man'.

The wider society provides a vocabulary of terms which carry their own social weight. Clearly some are highly charged with meanings given to them by ideologies of dominance: racist terms are one category. But societal linguistic forms and

meanings may be reworked in interaction within subcultures. The meaning of name-calling terms depends upon the use to which they are being put in interaction.

The boys' description illustrates how name-calling functions to manage relationships among the children by contributing to the public maintenance of the hierarchical social structure of children's cultures. Name-calling entails the negotiation of social identities. Not surprisingly, the most common type of name-calling refers to the most obvious expression of identity, appearance. As the extract from the three boys illustrates, their culture contains idealised images of male and female which provide the basis for the potential for negative evaluation, through name-calling, of every deviation from them. Some attributes, being fat for example, already carry a negative social evaluation imported from the wider society. Others, having ginger hair for example, import no such ideological charge, and acquire their effectiveness solely from the motivation in the interactional context. Some terms, such as 'ginger', have a peculiar pejorative history within children's culture as a mark of difference, others are apparently innocuous but acquire social significance among children through the act of labelling. Ben and Simon, two boys at Woodshire school, were explaining how to deal with name-calling by another boy.

B: We call him 'Clacker shoes' and that shuts him up.

S: That shuts him up that does because his name is James Clark and Clark's shoes, we call him 'Clacker shoes' and it shuts him up.

The effectiveness of this term is not dependent at all on any societal meaning attached to it, but solely on the meaning that it is given by its intention in interaction. It is because name-calling is primarily used for the assertion of dominance that apparently innocuous epithets can be experienced as hurtful. This is particularly true among friends, when they are falling out or even when the intention is playful.

### **Ideologies in name-calling**

In the three schools, two children stood out as being subject to the greatest amount of verbal harassment. Interestingly, it was on similar grounds. Mark at Woodshire school usually came to school unwashed and with dirty clothes. He was associated with 'germs', which also had some similarity in sound to his surname. Michelle at Greenshire school was associated with 'fleas'. The connection with 'fleas' arose from an incident some time previously when it was rumoured that she had nits in her hair. The underlying social meaning of the stigmatisation of Michelle was that she was made to symbolise a social identity that the other children rejected. This imputed identity comprised two linked elements. One could be summed up as 'poor working class'. It was most frequently invoked by references to her clothes and her hair, as well as to fleas. The second was 'childishness'. Michelle was the leading member of a group of girl friends which was at the bottom of the children's social status hierarchy. The highest status group was a large mixed boys and girls group who constantly depreciated Michelle's group for playing childish games, for not wearing fashionable clothes, and for not playing with and going out with boys. The

underlying function of the name-calling of Michelle was to mark out the boundary between two subcultures in the classes based on two divergent and conflicting class and gender identities.

The construction and assertion of gender identities was one of the most pervasive social processes of the children's cultures. This entailed aggressive verbal and physical behaviour by some, though not all, of the boys, both among themselves and directed at the girls. Many of the girls talked to us about problems of harassment by boys, including name-calling. They distinguished these boys from others who did not harass them in these ways: there were other male identities available within peer culture. There were virtually no reports however of the use of sexist terms by the boys. Their assertion of a particular version of male identity was accomplished through acts of verbal dominance, but not through the use of specifically sexist terms.

There was widespread agreement among the white children that name-calling about one's family was the most hurtful kind. The most offensive remarks were made either about families splitting up or family members' illness or death. Children in those situations were vulnerable to particularly offensive remarks. Hayley's comment is typical.

When they say 'Oh your mum's done this and your mum's done that and your dad's gone, and you haven't got a father'. It really gets you up-boiled and you just want to swing at them don't you.

Bindi was a boy who had said that he did not often get called racist names. Imran explained how Bindi had been made very upset by taunting about his mother.

I: People started picking on him because when his mum died he had quite a lot of time off school and they went up to him and said 'Skiver, Bindi' and things like that and they asked him why he was away and he didn't want to tell anyone [ . . . ] and then at last they got on his nerves and he just said 'My mum's dead, that's why'. And they go 'Hey his mum's dead' and then they started spreading it all round the school. When he had little arguments people used to go and say to him 'I'm glad your mum is dead' and things like that.

RH: Why did people do this? Is it because they didn't like Bindi as a person?

I: No, they like him but when they got angry.

'Family' name-calling clearly draws on ideological notions of the ideal family. But the greater part of the negative charge that such terms carry comes not from the negative value that society may ascribe to deviations from that ideological model, but more directly from the evocation of personal unhappiness that the victim must have felt at a family tragedy. The social meaning of 'family' name-calling is not

primarily imported from the wider society, it is constructed within children's culture itself.

It is possible to distinguish between two types of name-calling situations. The first is when children 'got angry'. Gillian at Greenshire school explained this type. She was talking about arguments with her sister.

G: I don't know what I say to her but it's instantly in my mind and I just say it. I've got no control over what I say to my sister.

RH: Really? Is that true of things at school with your friends here too, that you've sort of got no control over what you say to them sometimes, or is it different?

G: Well sometimes I've no control over things that I think of.

RH: When does this happen?

G: When they start picking on me and accusing me of something. It just comes out.

'Hot' name-calling like this occurred during heated disputes, often between friends, and afterwards often led to feelings of regret and guilt, and to apologies, though many children felt that the heated emotional state excused or justified name-calling



that would otherwise have been regarded as unacceptable calculated harassment. It can be contrasted with 'cold' name-calling situations, in which children deliberately teasing or harassing other children for pleasure. For many children, aggressive behaviour, verbal or physical, is *fun*, especially in the routine of school. According to Vicky, Adam, a boy at Hillside school, suffered from this.

V: Because he's little people pick on him and call him 'Titch' and that and he can lose his temper very easily. And Adam is the one who gets into trouble instead of them.

RH: Why do people do that?

V: I don't know really. I think they do it so they can torment him because they know he is going to flare up, but then he ends up hurting them and goes to Mr. H [*the headteacher*].

RH: Why do you think they like tormenting him?

V: I suppose it's just because they know that they are going to upset him and they love to see him upset and in a rage.

## RELATIONSHIPS AMONG FRIENDS

To understand these incidents of name-calling it is necessary to place them in the context of the social processes of children's peer relations, beginning with relations among friends.

At Hillside school there was a group of girls called the 'granny gang': Donetta, Sarah, Charlotte, Vicky, Amanda, Emma, and Sally, the acknowledged leader. There are also pair relationships - 'best friends' - within the granny gang: either achieved, e.g. Charlotte and Vicky, or competed for, e.g. to be Sally's best friend. There are two interdependent elements in the social structure of the girls' relationships. One is one-to-one best friend relationships. The other is the group. Their strength and balance vary with different individuals, and over time.

It is important to emphasise how strong an attachment best-friend relationships often were. It is brought out by these heartfelt comments by Charlotte about her relationship with Vicky. Charlotte explained that she had agreed to be Amanda's partner to go swimming instead of Vicky's.

RH: Why did you want to be Amanda's partner instead of Vicky's?

C: Because she asked me first. I said yes. And then when Vicky asked me I wanted to do it but I said "'No I'm sorry I'm Amanda's'. I felt so horrible. [ . . . ] Sometimes we've fell out

for 5 minutes and I've always gone to her and said 'Sorry Vicky'. I even ring her up at night. I don't know why but I just can't stand being not friends with Vicky, I don't know why.

It is necessary to understand not just the character of the group and the closeness of the pair relationships within it, but the complex interaction *between* these two levels of analysis. Perhaps the key mechanism that links the two levels can be described by the notion of 'valency' in relationships. Some girls are 'polyvalent', they seem more capable of maintaining more than one close relationship. But many are 'monovalent': only able to maintain one 'best friend' at a time. In these relationships, the competitiveness over friends is greater, and so is the conflict. But this phenomenon is not just the property of relationships between two individuals, it is strongly influenced by the group (and of course the stronger the group, the stronger the potential influence). The group functions to 'manage' these sets of relationships. It is the arena in which collective evaluation of its members' behaviour is arrived at. It attempts to regulate behaviour and remedy conflict. It embodies a culture which shapes its members' behaviour and is in turn continuously reproduced through it. At its core is a set of social-psychological understandings, and a set of moral principles and judgements, based on a combination of ideas taken from the wider society and ideas 'proved in practice' by their previous personal experience (of motivations, personal characteristics, causal relationships etc). These furnish group members with a socially constructed conceptual framework (though that is not to imply that all group members conform to it: on the contrary, it is the product of continual reappraisal and negotiation) which can be readily applied to each new problematic

interpersonal episode (which themselves are variations on a limited number of repeated social scripts).

Finally, it needs to be remembered that these relationships are in a constant state of more or less rapid change, though having said that it is also important to note that that change may take place within the framework of a set of relationships that, in the case of children in the last year of primary school, has been maintained for a number of years, perhaps their entire school life. Children's relationships have a historical dimension, and children are aware of that.

### **RELATIONSHIPS IN A BOYS' GROUP**

Relationships among boys will be examined by again using one class at Hillside school as an example. There are 15 boys in the class. Most of them form one grouping, some being more central to it than others. Its core members are Zabeel, Philip, Paul, David, Martin, Sean, Simon, Matthew and Liam. Other boys in the class may relate to the group casually or through friendships with particular members.

Many of the children thought that, unlike the girls, there was little conflict among the boys. This is Paul.

RH: Do you think that their groups are the same as yours or different? In what they do or how they behave?

P: Different.

RH: What's different about it?

P: I think the girls have more arguments than the boys do.

RH: Do they? Why do you think that? How do you know?

P: Well if say Vicky went and played with Sally's group that normally starts an argument because the group that Vicky used to be in say 'You took my friend away I want her back' and that will start an argument.

RH: And you are saying that doesn't happen with boys.

P: No, not very often.

RH: Why do you think there is that difference?

P: I don't think boys are as bothered because they know that they will get back together again sooner or later. They will get back together quicker than the girls would.

The girls shared this view. The success with which the boys achieve a relatively harmonious relationship within the group is indicated by these comments by Donetta.

D: Because like all the girls in our class they are all stuck to Sally and the boys just play with anybody. Like one boy will just go and play with one boy and another day he will go and play with somebody different, but the girls every break time and dinner they will play with Sally.

[...]

RH: Why do you think boys are different from the girls?

D: Probably because girls act sometimes more like little girls where boys they just play about and all that, where we take things more seriously than they do.

RH: When you say you take things more seriously, do you mean that your friendships mean more to you than the boys' friendships?

D: Probably, because there is like a few of us like that, but there is some of us who always seem to be arguing all the while, but you never really see the boys arguing.

Donetta explains the difference in terms of the boys' relationships not being as close, as serious and as competitive as the girls'. This last point needs further examination, because it might be expected that there are strong processes of dominance-assertion among the boys. It is interesting that this does not seem to be the case within the boys' group. Assertion of dominance certainly takes place by group members, but it is directed *outside* the group, not at its members. (One aspect of this is the lack of racist behaviour directed at Zabeel by other group members). Attempted dominance-assertion within the group is criticised as 'showing off'. So it does not seem to be the case that, as might be suggested by certain stereotyped ideas about boys' behaviour, intragroup relations are characterised by conflict over dominance-assertion.

Nor are boys' relationships characterised by the volatile competitiveness over best friends that is typical of the girls' group, where even trivial everyday disagreements frequently become transmuted into intense renegotiations of friendship relations. This is not because there is not jealousy and insecurity among the boys over friendship relations, but because they manage this potential source of conflict differently. In the following extract Paul explains how they deliberately minimise conflict by subordinating the partisan claims of best friend pair relations to the well-being of the group as a whole, and by avoiding a hierarchy or a leader.

RH:     You didn't choose any one of them as a special best friend.

P: No, they're all the same. I don't know I think if I chose David as my best friend, the others wouldn't like it as much, so I really like them all without saying.

RH: You mean you think that if you sort of played more with David, other people would sort of get jealous?

P: Probably, if we went away and we didn't play with them for say a few weeks, I think if we wanted to go back, I don't they would let us, because we had gone off and hadn't played with them.

RH: Do you mean that it is important that people sort of treat each other equally in the group?

P: Yes I think it is.

RH: Can you think how that works out, some ways that that happens?

P: Normally when we play football or some other sports, we normally pass to each other, mostly, we pass to the ones that we all go around together.



RH: What other things could people do that people would say 'Oh that's not fair'?

P: If they all went off and just left me and say Mark I probably wouldn't think that was fair, because they had gone and left you, and you normally go around with them.

RH: Does that ever happen?

P: No, not very often. Probably every three months.

[...]

RH: Do you have many arguments in the group?

P: No, we don't have hardly any arguments at all. Probably about once a month.

RH: What are they about?

P: They are normally about if you've been going round with someone else and they've been calling the other person, not exactly really nasty names but just like keep him away from him.

RH: Why should they do that?

P: I don't really know.

RH: So has your group got a leader?

P: No.

It is worth pointing out how football, which most of the boys played a great deal at break times, as a team game with a large number of players in the side, both expresses and helps to reproduce these social relationships (see Connolly, 1994). However, there is something more fundamental underlying the boys' social relationships which governs how they manage conflict differently from the girls. Emma is very perceptive in understanding how boys control their feelings and thus prevent potential conflict from escalating.

E: Well they do disagree about little things but they don't blow their tops and call each other down things, like that, they just stay away from them for a while then just get friends again.

RH: Why is that do you think? Is it because the boys are more sensible and self-controlled than the girls, or is it because things don't matter so much to them or what could it be?

E: Well most of the girls in our class and all round the school let their feelings out more than the boys do, because deep down their feelings are upset about it but they just don't let it out so it doesn't get into a big argument.

RH: How do you know that deep down they feel upset?

E: Well you can see the way they react, their faces.

RH: Do you think that boys think that if they let their feelings out they are not behaving like boys should?

E: Well they think if they can keep everything inside and don't bring it all out, they think they can act tough and big and think if they did cry everybody else would think they were like weeds and mardy.

RH: If one of them did cry would you think that?

E: Not really, because everybody feels like crying but the boys just don't let it out so much as the girls.

There is a distinction to be made here between the tactic of pretending that you are not hurt by something in order to deny satisfaction to the doer and discourage

repetition, which Emma herself utilises, and the socially structured institutionalisation of the suppression of an area of feelings in the culture of boys. What governs the boys' behaviour, and is responsible for the relatively successful conflict-management within the group, is a particular ideology of masculinity, characterised by control and suppression of personal feelings, a certain 'toughness', a disguising of vulnerability (Mac an Ghaill 1994). This ideology interpellates the boys via their families, television, the models provided by older boys and men, etc. But it gains its purchase by the affirming and sanctioning matrix (Therborn 1980) that is provided by everyday child interaction, which serves to continuously maintain the ideology as a central element within child culture.

#### **HIERARCHY AMONG BOYS' GROUPS**

Up to now the focus has been on relationships within the friendship group. Now the focus changes to relationships between groups. In the case of the boys, there is a significant contrast between the way that conflict is managed on the basis of the principle of equality within the group, and the competitive hierarchical relations that the group attempts to construct with other groups. Simon described the relationship between his group of friends and another group, of which Kevin was a member.

RH:     Would you say that - you and your gang - that you are better  
          than them?

S: Everybody says that. You'll hear 'We're much better than you'. You say that on impulse and they say 'No you're not, we're much better than you' and then probably start a scrap or something. Everybody boasts about it sooner or later in the gang.

RH: How do you mean everybody boasts about it?

S: Being in the gang. 'Our gang is better than your gang' type of thing, and it's that kind of thing that starts the fights.

RH: The people who say that, do they really believe that their gang is better than the others?

S: Of course, yes.

RH: So what makes this gang better?

S: Because they are in it. Because the person who is thinking it says that gang is best because I am in it. Say I was thinking 'This is the best gang because I am in it' and then suddenly Zabeel said 'I don't like you any more, get out of the gang'. I went over and probably joined Kevin's lot and then I would

think 'Oh this gang is best because I'm in it'. It's the gang that you are in.

RH: So if somebody was looking from outside they wouldn't be able to tell which gang is better, they would look the same?

S: Probably not. Well to be honest, we're probably all equal. Well Kevin's gang is mostly 3rd years and we're 4th years.

RH: What does that mean, well I know you're a year older, so what?

S: You've got a hold over them. 'We're older than you, don't cheek your elders', that sort of thing. 'We're 4th years and you're only titchy 3rd years so come here and lick my feet'.

### **BOYS' RELATIONS WITH YOUNGER CHILDREN**

The importance of age cohort difference to the 'culture of male dominance' is illustrated by the following extract, in which Sean admits to harassing younger children.

RH: What do you do together at school?

S: Play football in the yard, go round nicking balls off people, taking them and playing about with them. It's mainly mucking about with balls.

RH: Who do you take them off?

S: Anybody, anybody who has got a ball.

RH: Little children?

S: Yes.

Yvonne, Jodie and Andrew offer further confirmation.

Y: Boys do it most of the time - 7 out of 10 boys would do it, and 7 out of 10 girls would do. When you think about it because there's Philip in Mr. R's class, and Zabeel. They think they are tough and they pick on younger people. So the 1st years, 2nd years, 3rd years get scared that we will tell all their friends, so they don't go near them.

RH: When you say they pick on them, what sort of things do they do?

A: Call names, bully you, push you over.

Y: When they're running sometimes they make up a gang and run and when you run past each other they get their shoulders and pull them round, so they fall over or something and hurt themselves.

It would be wrong to see this solely in terms of older boys' antisocial behaviour against younger children. This would certainly confirm notions of male dominance, but the picture is more complex. Again, an analysis is needed in terms of a field of behaviour patterns collectively constructed by all the participants, though not with equal power. The two governing elements of the behavioural field are fun and assertion, particularly by boys: younger boys against older boys and girls; older boys against younger boys and girls. These incidents are the repeated social episodes by which the age and gender hierarchy which structures all the children's relationships in the school is continually remade and repaired. Sean's analysis confirms and adds one element: the network of protection that may be invoked to link younger and older children, in this case especially older boys.

RH: And what about how older children and younger children get on. Again do they more or less leave each other alone or are younger children always annoying older children and older ones sometimes bullying younger ones?



S: Exactly. Younger children always annoying older children and in that case the older children start to kick them down. It's the only way of retaliating - well it's not the only way but it's the way most boys react. Say if a first year came up to you 'Oi fatso come here'. 'Come here and say that' I'd say. They would come up to you - 'Fatso' - whack.

RH: Why do the younger children do this?

S: They're trying to find out how tough you are and they just want to annoy you for the fun of it.

RH: Is it always the older children who are reacting to this and the younger ones who start it, or is it sometimes the older ones who start it?

S: Sometimes the older ones.

RH: So what might they do?

S: Pick on the little ones. Say one of the little ones is walking around with a bag of crisps, one of the older ones will go whoosh and catch it, and hold it in the air and the first year will jump up and catch it. Things like that happen a lot.

RH: Would you say that it ever goes further than that? In other words that there are some younger children who perhaps get picked on and get upset by older children?

S: Sometimes there are. Say I tried to annoy a first year. He'd probably go to some 4th years that I don't like, like Kevin's lot, and he would probably try and get them to help him. If Adam was annoying one of the first years then he would probably crumple and call for help. Not exactly Mafia but that's the kind of thing. He would ask somebody older to help.

#### **HIERARCHICAL RELATIONS AMONG GIRLS' GROUPS**

Hierarchical relations also existed among the girls' groups. They were most clearly marked at Greenshire school, where there was a large mixed-sex group, containing perhaps twenty children, which was regarded by its members as the highest status group in the school. The girls in this group contrasted themselves with and defined themselves against, another group of girls, as three members of this lower-status group, Lorna, Michelle and Samantha, explained.

M: There's Lesley, Kirsty, Nicola, Katherine. All the ones who think they are everything.

K: Yes, they think they are in charge of everything. They think they're dead pretty and glamorous and they think they can boss everyone around. They're the people that think they know everything, they think 'Ugh those people can't have boyfriends, ugh they can't do this, they're not good enough'. And it really gets on us lot's nerves.

K: And all the boys are always picking on you.

Nicola, Nathan and Stuart explained how the mixed group saw the girls' group in comparison with themselves.

S: For one thing they don't like football.

NS: And they're all girls.

N: And they don't like argue, they're not naughty. They're like teacher's pet sort of thing.

S: They like Bros. [*a pop group*]

N: Most people in our group hang round with each other and don't like them. Say like Michelle who is a skank or something, they don't like her or anything. But I don't think they will ever play

with them. Their group don't like this group because we do different things to them. If we're on the field they go in one corner, play games like you know infants play, He-man or something, they play like Neighbours or something. We never do that, it's always sport we do. [*'Skank' means being the opposite of smart and trendy in appearance*].

RH: Do you think that you are more grownup than they are or is it not that, it's just that they are different?

S: Both I think.

N: Some of them in their group are a bit babyish, but some like Sharon and Louise they are like grownup. Like when they get older they'll probably want to be...

S: Like Sharon said she wanted to be a secretary.

N: Like the people in our group they want to do sport, things that are different. Like they want to do different things, like we want do adventurous things like pilot or nurse.

S: Dangerous.

RH: And do you think they are like that now, they are not so adventurous?

N: They're like - if the teacher gives them work, well it takes us ages to do it, they just do it straight away.

RH: It's not because they are cleverer than you?

N: People in this group, they probably muck around and things like that, but most of them are brainy.

S: When it comes to doing hard work that we've got to get done, it will get done.

N: At tests we will do it, we won't sit there and chatter, but if it's work we'll probably chatter to our friends and do work and keep talking and things like that. They just get on with it.

RH: And this group is all girls?

N: Yes, they never play with boys.

These two extracts introduce all the key points of difference between the two groups.

The mixed group regarded themselves as superior because they played football

while the girls' group played childish games, they combined school work with having fun in class while the girls' group were conformist, they liked adventure, and in their group boys and girls played together. The girls' group were made constantly aware that the mixed group regarded them as inferior. There were of course other groups in the two classes, of boys and of girls. There was no boys' equivalent of this girls' group in terms of its cultural positioning. All the children acknowledged the social spectrum whose ends were occupied by the two groups, and took up intermediate positions along it.

### **RELATIONS BETWEEN GIRLS AND BOYS**

Reference has been made to the research evidence confirming the prevalence of sex-segregation among children. However, Thorne (1993) warns against the dangers of simplification inherent in a dualistic 'different cultures' model. She uses the term 'borderwork' to refer to the various forms of cross-sex interaction that take place outside the sponsorship of the teacher. It is often aggressive in form, as two girls at Hillside, Sarah and Donetta, confirmed.

S: If you've got a scarf on or anything like that, like they were doing today. They get your scarf and run away with it or if you kind of trip over, your shoe comes off, they'll get your shoe and they go 'Ohhh' and start making fun of you and start saying 'Oh you love so and so' and you feel like kicking them. But if you kick them you get suspended.

RH: What sort of names do they call you?

S: The boys it's just like swearing and all that but because I'm tall they always call me 'Lanky' and all names like that and they call... sometimes 'Mophead'.

RH: When you say swearing, what sort of swearing. Can you give me an idea of the sort of things?

D: It's normally like, if it's Jennie its 'Go and tell Sally she's a 'lady dog", but sometimes Jennie will come over herself and say . . .

S: Some of the boys who are not in our class they'll go up and say 'You're a lanky 'lady dog". I just call them names. Well... Sean I just call him 'Basin head' because he always has a kind of basin round here. I call him 'Freckle face' or 'Four eyes'.

[...]

D: Sometimes if we go and tell they start calling us 'Babies'.

S: They say 'You can't fight up for your own battles, what a baby'.

This aggressive male-initiated borderwork serves the function of maintaining gender boundaries and reinforcing male dominance, as the double-bind in the girls' closing remarks demonstrates. But cross-sex interaction can also be non-aggressive and prosocial.

### **ROMANCE RELATIONS**

One of the most powerful deterrents to cross-sex friendship is that it makes children vulnerable to taunts about romantic attachments (Schofield 1981, p69; Thome 1986, p171). Group activities such as football make it possible for girls and boys to play together without that risk. However, the most developed form of cross-sex interaction in the three schools was the emergence of a subculture of boyfriend and girlfriend relationships. Involvement in it, or not, represented the most important marker of cultural differentiation in the classes studied in the three schools. The process was most advanced at Greenshire school. 'Romance relationships' were a central and public element in the emerging culture of the large mixed-sex group that was generally regarded as the highest-status group in the two parallel top classes. For some of these children this was not new: they had had boyfriends and girlfriends, at least nominally, when they were younger. But it was now becoming a much more salient and meaningful part of their social lives. Most of the children in the top group had girlfriends and boyfriends.

In contrast to the large body of literature on the characteristics, functions and meanings of same-sex 'best friend' relations, 'romance' relationships in childhood



have received very little attention. Most studies of children's culture make little or no mention of them. For example, Askew and Ross (1988), in their study of boys and sexism in primary and secondary schools say nothing at all about this issue. In part this is a function of their viewing gender relations only through the lens of the 'pupil context'. Partly it is the consequence of their decision to focus primarily on sexism in boys' schools, in the belief that they are more polarised situations which will illuminate sexist processes more clearly. That focus automatically excludes all those aspects of gender, including 'romance' and sexist processes, which arise from cross-gender interaction. Other writers have found that boyfriend/girlfriend relationships did not exist in the schools they studied. Kathleen Clarricoates, in an account of her study of 9-11 year old children in four primary schools (Clarricoates 1987, p192), simply says that 'the majority of the girls...did not seek status via their relationships with boys'. (Unfortunately she does not elaborate on the relationships of the minority of girls). Andrew Pollard (1985, pp64-7) gives a glimpse of romance relationships among his 11-year-old 'jokers' and 'gangs', but does not explore them further. Even Thorne says little about what she calls 'sexual and romantic themes' (1993, pp81-2).

What were the characteristics, functions and meanings of romance relations among the children in the mixed group at Greenshire? Most girls and boys changed partners quite rapidly. Their relationships usually lasted a few weeks at most, and sometimes only a day or so. In contrast, a few relationships had lasted much longer, most notably the romance between Nicola and Ross, generally agreed to be the leading girl and boy in the class, which had lasted the whole school year.

'Going out' opened up a number of new areas of enjoyable social activity. The simplest and most commonplace activity was simply having fun talking and being together. Having a laugh, 'dossing around', was the most common answer that children gave to being asked what boyfriends and girlfriends did together.

The daily games of football also provided an arena for romance relations, both for proving themselves against the boys and for chatting with them as the action ebbed and flowed. For some of the girls, it was the main attraction of playing football (though many also enjoyed it for its own sake). Romance relationships opened up or gave new meaning to a range of social activities involving going out together in a group. This is Katy.

K: Sometimes the boys take the girls to the pictures. Sometimes we go in a big bunch about five girls and five boys, all like girlfriends and boyfriends.

Romance relations also opened up the possibilities for a different sort of social activity, including kissing and other forms of proto-sexual play. Katy continues.

RH: When people go out what do they do?

K: Well most of the time we don't do nothing really because the boys are always playing football but after school sometimes we meet at the school and go to that tree over there and just sit and

put your arms round each other and just kiss each other and things like that.

Another source of enjoyment that romance provided was the opportunity for gossip and manipulation. Though boys also enjoyed and took part in this, for the girls in particular one of their main topics of conversation was who fancied whom. They made up lists of their own choices, speculated about others', and helped fix up liaisons on behalf of each other.

What is the intersubjective content of these romance relationships? Are they simply an enjoyable social ritual with little significance in terms of personal feelings or psychological intimacy? This is Janet Schofield's assessment in her account of her research into gender relations among 11 and 12 year olds in an American middle school (1981, pp71-2):

Analysis of the common patterns of courting behaviour suggests that these patterns are not conducive to the development of friendship for a variety of reasons. Virtually none of these behavior patterns involves any significant amount of relaxed or extended contact. Typically, contact and communication during these episodes is highly constricted and contains virtually no content except for the indication of romantic or sexual interest.

On the basis of discussions with the children in the mixed group two points arise which question this evaluation. The first relates to the centrality of 'having a laugh' to all their peer relationships. The focus in the education literature has, for obvious reasons, largely been on the meaning of humour in the teacher-pupil context: as a means of resisting boredom, of cementing amicable teacher-pupil relations, or of subverting them (Woods 1976; Pollard 1985, pp68-71). What also needs investigating is the meaning of humour and fun as the basis and medium of intersubjective communication among children, a means by which a certain level of psychological intimacy can be established and experienced.

The second point concerns whether real emotions of affection and caring can be identified in these preadolescent romances. There is some evidence that this is the case in the longer-lasting relationships, and it comes across in this account by Nicola of her relationship with Ross.

RH:     So how long have you been going out now? It must be quite a while?

N:       Yes but sometimes people can't keep up with us because if we like shout at each other, he says 'Right forget it now' or I say 'Forget it', but straight away we get back together again, so I've been going out with him for about two years. But if we pack it in, we go out with each other the same day, we don't like going out with anyone else. He likes me and I only like him. So we

always make friends, all the time. We never like pack each other in and go out with another person because he don't want to and I don't want to. We both feel the same way.

For most children, their romance relationships were quite short-lived and breaking up did not upset them, particularly as they all remained in the same circle of friends and it was usually easy to start a new relationship. But Katy tells a different story, of how her relationship with Tom ended after they had been going out for a long time.

RH: Were you upset about that?

K: Yes, he was one of the best boys I went out with. Because we got on ever so well. Everyone said that we got on the best out of like everyone who was going out. We got on ever so well. I think like I got used to going out with him. It must have been about a year ago. Like all the little children used to say I'm going to marry this person. I used to like think that. Then when I thought 'That's stupid that is, we won't stay together for this long' and then he packed me in. So I wasn't very pleased.

RH: What did you do when you found that out?

K: Well, one thing, I wasn't very happy. I was a bit grumpy for about a week, then I just forgot all about it. I thought there is no point in worrying about it. He said he wasn't going to go back out with me, so there was no point in worrying about it.

An assessment of the social meaning of the romance relationships studied must first of all locate them in a particular stage of children's development. They appear in the forms which have been described here at the beginning of the process of transition from middle childhood to adolescence. Romance is a central element in this new stage of development, both developmentally, as children reach puberty, and socially, as they begin to enter into the heterosexual culture of adolescence. Romance represents and enacts 'growing up', moving into the world of adolescence and then adulthood. As the period of transition begins, a complex process of social differentiation takes place in relation to a set of social orientations, which embody a range of possible social identities. Romance, closely coupled with 'dossing', is the predominant cultural element structuring this social field, in relation to which various orientations define themselves.

It is clear from discussions with children that, not invariably but in general, it was girls who played the leading role in terms of romance relationships. This is true of the interpersonal relationships themselves, where for example it was often the girl who initiated them. It was also in general the girls more than the boys who were preoccupied with constructing the meta-narrative of romance: a great deal of the

social interaction within the mixed group, and particularly among the girls, was concerned with gossip, humour and intrigue about boyfriends and girlfriends. Romance was a source of social power for girls over boys, while at the same time serving to initiate and reinforce cultural processes, becoming amplified in adolescence and adulthood, of gender differentiation and, ultimately, of male dominance. It is also evident that, again in general, it was the girls who in discussion had the most to say about romance relationships, and showed greater insight into them. Children enter this stage of transition from middle childhood to adolescence unevenly. They are differentiated by a number of factors, one of which is gender. There are several gender processes at work here. One is developmental: the earlier sexual development of girls than boys, itself an uneven development. Others are social: and two in particular. First, the powerful social pressures within the dominant culture, felt as natural social destiny, on girls to have boyfriends, transmitted by their experiences of heterosexual relationships among older brothers and sisters and girls and boys in their community, and reinforced by commercial youth culture. Secondly, the particular orientation of girls - a gender difference noted by numerous writers on children's friendships - towards greater involvement in personal relationships.

## CONCLUSION

In this chapter the principal social processes of children's peer relationships are identified. The most common form of aggressive behaviour was name-calling. Its effect was achieved not solely by the importation into children's cultures of adult

terms of verbal abuse, often drawing on ideologies of oppression, but the meanings which certain terms derived from within children's cultures themselves.

One context for name-calling was conflict between friends. 'Falling out' and 'breaking friends' was common, and because of the personal investment in friendship relations, particularly between 'best friends', conflict was often heated and hurtful. There were significant gender differences. Boys tended to manage their relationships with less conflict within the group. This was achieved at the expense of the more intimate psychological involvement of the girls' friendships.

Relationships between groups also entailed conflict, in the ongoing struggle to accomplish, maintain or challenge hierarchies based on a number of key cultural markers. Age was also a major principle governing hierarchical relations, in this case between different age cohorts.

Sex segregation remained an important principle of the children's cultures. Nevertheless there was a great deal of cross-sex interaction, much of it conflictual, often in the form of playful teasing, but sometimes taking a more aggressive form as boys harassed girls. One significant type of cross-sex relationship that was becoming prominent among the children studied was 'romance relationships'.



## CHAPTER 8

### RACISM AND CHILDREN

In chapter 7 the most salient social processes of children's cultures were described. The subject of this chapter is the extent to which, and the ways in which, they became racialised.

#### RACIST NAME-CALLING: BLACK CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCES

The black children interviewed described racialised social interaction almost exclusively in terms of racist name-calling and related remarks. There were no instances of systematic physical harassment of black children in the three schools. In general, the black children found racist name-calling more hurtful than any other kind of name-calling. Claire at Greenshire school was asked if there were names that upset her a lot, and her answer was typical.

Yes when they call me about my colour. Feel strongly. I don't like people calling me things about my colour, I don't like it. I feel strong about my colour.

She said 'It doesn't really bother me about the other sorts of names, it's just the racist ones'. Aina, an Asian girl at the same school, was asked the same question.

A: I think 'Paki' upsets me a lot.

RH: Does it, why?

A: Like they're making fun of my religion. If they call me 'Paki' I sometimes tell the teacher or I just say a name back to them.

Natasha and Yvette at Woodshire school described the feelings that racist taunts provoked.

N: Feel angry. Feel like we're going to puncture their head in like and go shaking.

Y: Sometimes you feel sad and say 'I can't hit them, why can't I hit them'. I want them to hit me first [...] and Natasha's face is going bright red and your fist is like this [*she clenched it*].

N: Yes, my hands are shaking because I want to get my own way back.

RH: Really, it makes you angry. Does it hurt you, does it make you upset as well?

N: Yes.

The black children's experiences of being called racist names varied considerably. Some of the variation was the result of differences between schools. The most important factor here was the effectiveness of school policy. But much greater than the variation from school to school was the variation of experience within each school. Only in Woodshire school did any black children report that racist name-calling happened frequently. In the other two schools some black children reported that it happened sometimes, and in all three schools some black children said that they rarely experienced it.

The widest disparity of experience was in Woodshire school. Imran, Yvette, Natasha and Gurjit told us that racist name-calling happened to them quite often. Yvette put it most forcefully.

Y: All the time. Nearly every day I get called 'Blackie'.

RH: And is it usually by the same people or just anybody?

Y: Same people.

RH: So there are some people that you know that are likely to call you racist names and others who you know aren't going to do that? Is that right?

Y: Yes.

Gurjit had agreed to keep a diary. On several pages she wrote the same thing.

Why do you think people have rows? Is it because they like it or is it fighting, that's what I want to know.

She said that it was something that she thought about a lot, because ever since she had been at the school other children had been picking on her and calling her names. She described a recent incident. (Her surname was Bains).

And everybody was calling me Bains Banana ... I just don't like it, every time when I'm at home I feel like crying, calling me Bains Bananas and I don't like it. I'm getting fed up of it now. There was one person she was calling me this horrible name starting with B ..... 'bloody bastard' and then she started calling me a 'Bloody Paki'.

But not all the black children in Woodshire school had the same experience of racist name-calling. Two of them, Bindi and Nina, said that it only happened to them very rarely. Nina said 'There used to be, but everyone is my friend now. They haven't

called me any names so far'. The last incident she could remember had occurred a term or more before.

In Hillside school, Rafaqat, Nasar, Kevin, Tariq, Nazar and Baljit all said that they experienced racist name-calling from time to time. Rafaqat and Nasar were asked if there were any things they did not like about school. They said 'Yes, some of the children. They keep calling us 'Paki''. Nazar agreed: 'I do get called names quite a lot but not all the time'. They all agreed that children in their class did it, as well as younger children. Tariq said that friends wouldn't do it but other children might. Baljit said that it usually took place in the playground. Kevin, an Afro-Caribbean boy, reported that some boys in the class picked on him.

K: If they're in a bad mood they do. Like this boy called Roger he keeps calling me a 'Baboon', and Simon calls me the same and Aaron he calls me the same as well.

RH: Does this happen often?

K: No, not very often.

RH: Can you remember the last time it happened?

K: Last week.

Only one child, a girl called Ghazala, had a different view. She said that it used to happen to her when she first came to the school three years previously, but it never happened now.

In Greenshire school the picture again was mixed. Most of the black children said that it happened to them sometimes, and described incidents. Five children, all girls, said that they experienced racist name-calling very rarely or never.

### **Explanations for variations in frequency**

It is clear that racism, in the form of racist name-calling, was a part of the lives of almost all of the black children. For most of them, it was a part of their school lives as well as life outside school. It is also clear that there was a wide variation in black children's experiences of racist name-calling within the same school. These variations did not fall into simple ethnic or gender categories. In Woodshire school, for example, the two children who reported the highest level of racist name-calling were an Afro-Caribbean girl and a Pakistani boy. In Greenshire school there was one Afro-Caribbean girl, and she reported no recent experiences of racist name-calling.

The black children were invited to offer explanations for these discrepancies. Yvette and Nina in Woodshire school were not particularly close friends and had never discussed racism together before. They were surprised when they realised the disparity in their experiences, and agreed to discuss them together.

RH: How often would you say you might get called something because you are black?

Y: Nearly every day.

[...]

RH: [*to Nina*] Does it surprise you that it happens to Yvette so often?

N: I never knew.

RH: Now if I asked you the same question, 'How often does it happen to you?', what would you say?

N: Not very much.

RH: Does 'not very much' mean once a week, once a month...?

N: About once a month.

RH: So how many times - can you remember how many times this term?

N: Never.

RH: Never? Does this surprise you, Yvette, what Nina has just said.  
That it doesn't happen very often at all to her?

Y: Yes.

Their first explanation was that frequency varied according to ethnicity.

Y: Probably because I'm darker.

RH: Do you think it is the case that people who are West Indian are  
more likely to get called names than people who are Asian, or  
not?

Y: Yes.

N: Yes.

In her research, Kelly does find ethnic differences (1988, p13), but in the reverse direction: Asian pupils being more subject to name-calling than Afro-Caribbean. In that context, Yvette and Nina were invited to explain the case of Gurjit Bains, who was, like Nina, of Punjabi descent, with a similar skin colour to her, but who reported being called racist names much more frequently than Nina did.



Y: Yes because anyone can call her - like say 'Go back to...', also  
'Bains Bananas', and she's got two names they can call her,  
'Paki' as well.

N: Yes and like when they say that they get into calling her 'Paki'  
as well.

RH: So you mean they start off calling her names...

N: 'Bains Bananas' and stuff and then they start calling her 'Paki'.  
That's probably why Gurjit gets picked on.

RH: And you're saying that wouldn't happen to you because you  
haven't got names that they can make fun of like that? Is that  
right?

This answer begins to explain the discrepancy in terms of interaction processes rather than simply skin colour or ethnicity. It is true that some children's names are particularly susceptible to being made fun of, and that some children seized upon these opportunities. However, while it may be a contributory factor to the frequency of racist name-calling directed at Gurjit, it doesn't explain Yvette's experience.

What differentiates Yvette from Nina is her much greater frequency of involvement in conflict-situations. The higher the conflict-level in a situation the more likely it is

to give rise to racist name-calling. And children who are known from previous experience to be assertive in defending their interests are more likely to induce aggressive behaviour in many of the other children who come into conflict with them. This idea was raised with Yvette and Nina.

RH: Yvette said when we talked before that this often happens when you have races and things because people are ...

Y: Jealous that the other person won and they can't take it.

RH: Does that happen to you?

N: No.

RH: Why not, because you don't do races?

N: I do.

Y: Sometimes, but not very often.

N: It's just when it's big races.

Y: It's big races. Like Julie and Lisa they are determined to win, but for Nina and Hannah it's just a race. It's just a race for me

as well, and Natasha and everyone, but Julie and Lisa they just want to win each other and they just can't take it. Julie kept on winning Lisa and one day Lisa won her, and Julie couldn't take that so she breaks friends with her and I reckon she was jealous.

RH: So what I think Yvette is saying is that because Yvette is good at running races, some people get jealous of that and call her names as a result. Would you say that is true?

N: Yes.

RH: Does the same thing ever happen to you? Do you think that people call you names because they are jealous of things you have done?

N: Never has.

RH: Why do you think it's different?

N: It's not different, it's just never happened. It might, but it never has done though.

RH: But I'm wondering why. Has it never happened to you just because you don't run races and win them as often as Yvette, so people aren't so jealous of you about races?

N: Yes, because I don't much win.

This explanation is confirmed by a separate discussion held with two friends of Yvette, Natasha and Rebecca. They also saw that the difference in how Nina and Yvette spent their playtimes had implications for the sort of interaction they engaged in with other children.

N: Yvette is more popular.

R: Nina just plays football and there's everybody lying there [*on the grass*], Nina is just playing football, so nobody bothers with her, but with Yvette and Natasha they are always around. They are always everywhere messing about, having a laugh, and that's when people start calling names when they've got the chance, but with Nina you can't get hold of her because she's running down the football pitch trying to get the ball.

Incidents of racist name-calling need to be understood in the context of the social interaction episodes in which they occur. In this way not only variations in the

frequency of racist name-calling but also variations in its social function and meaning can begin to be explained.

### **THE MEANINGS OF RACIST NAME-CALLING**

To understand racist name-calling and other forms of racist behaviour it is necessary to explore its social significance in children's interaction and the meanings it has for the white children who use it. In this section it will be argued that there are three codes of racist name-calling, and that the distinction between them derives from children's different applications of the concept of equality in racialised contexts.

#### **Illegitimate defence**

In a discussion with Nicola and Stuart, two white children at Greenshire school, they spoke about other children in the two classes.

S:       Some of them don't like the Asian people do they?

N:       They're alright. You probably talk about them and call them names, which they don't like, but then you like apologise to them or something.

S:       Because you say it accidentally and hurt their feelings.

RH: Does that happen sometimes?

N: Yes, like Bhupinder.

S: I've done it before.

RH: What happened?

N: You don't mean to say it. You say something like 'Go and have a wash' or something. It's horrible, you wouldn't like it but it's just like gets on your nerves, like Sandeep gets on my nerves, but I never call her names. Sometimes she's alright but sometimes she walks round me and gets on my nerves a bit, and I don't like upsetting her really.

S: I wouldn't call her names.

N: I probably would if I was that mad.

RH: When you say 'Why don't you go and have a wash', something like that, is that something that you have said?

N: I've seen loads of people saying that. From like different schools to someone, and sometimes you like feel sorry for them don't you?

S: When you get angry it just slips out. You hurt their feelings and you have to go and apologise. It's happened to me.

RH: What happened, can you remember?

S: No I can't remember, but I know it has happened.

RH: Did you apologise?

S: Yes I did.

RH: Why did you?

S: Because it's not very nice - it's not their fault that they are a different colour to us. It's just the way they were born. Older people call them horrible names. We've heard them on the telly and things like that, and we've got them in our minds and then when you get angry with them we say it but we don't mean to.

Many children spoke in similar terms of incidents when they had used racist names in what they regarded as self-defence. It is the racial form of 'hot' name-calling that was identified earlier. They explained that racist name-calling occurred as the result of feeling angry or upset, when it just 'came out'. Afterwards they felt sorry that they had said it, because it hurt black children's feelings unfairly. To attack black children on racial grounds was a breach of the principle of equality because, as Stuart says, 'it's not their fault that they are a different colour to us'.

A typical incident of this type involved a white girl, Angelina, and a black girl, Gurjit, at Woodshire school. They were members of the same group of girls and sat at the same table in class. As part of the research, Angelina was keeping a diary and she wrote this in it:

Today I had an argument with Gurjit Bains in net-ball. She fell out with me and she kept pulling faces at me. So I called her pakky I felt bad about it but it just came out. So I said 'sorry, let's make friends' so we made friends and we played races together.

In a long discussion with Angelina about this incident, she explained that Gurjit had called her 'pigface' and she had said 'go away Paki'.

RH: When you said 'Go away Paki', why do you think you said that rather than 'Go away pigface' or anything else you could have said?



A: Don't know. It's hard to say. I don't know really, it just came out.

Int Has it come out like that before with other people?

A: No, because I hadn't had a very big argument with anybody before. [...]

RH: Do you think that her calling you 'Pig face' and you calling her 'Paki' are about the same?

A: Yes.

RH: Do you think that if you had called her 'Pig face' instead of 'Paki' would that have hurt her more or less or about the same?

A: Less I think.

RH: Do you mean that calling her 'Paki' is the worst thing you can call her?

A: Yes. I don't really mind playing with people different colour from me as long as I've got a friend, but sometimes they annoy

me. [...] I've got a really hard temper. When somebody calls me I go mad. [...] I think I just wanted to get my own back.

Each child chose to call the other a name that was most offensive. Gurjit chose 'pigface'; for Angelina 'Paki' was roughly equivalent, but more effective against Gurjit than 'pigface'. When she says 'I don't really mind playing with people different colour from me as long as I've got a friend, but sometimes they annoy me', she means that colour is irrelevant to friendship choice, but that black children, just like white children, sometimes annoy her. In this case she turned spontaneously to the most hurtful term to get her own back, and then regretted it because it breached her own racially egalitarian belief that, as she said, 'It doesn't matter what colour you are really, does it? As long as you are alright'.

### **Legitimate defence**

For Angelina, to use racist remarks even in self-defence was illegitimate. But not all children regretted using racist name-calling defensively in 'hot' situations. Some saw it as a legitimate tactic in arguments with black children. This is Samantha at Greenshire school.

S: I've called racist things. I don't call it because I'm nasty, because at the old school we didn't have any different coloured children. When I came to this school I didn't know it would be so bad. I didn't know anything about racist. I didn't know what

it meant and I know what it means now, and I called Jagdeep, did I tell you, 'Bobble 07' because they wear bobbles on their heads for their religion, because he was picking on me and then I picked on him and I just called him a name.

RH: Why do you think you called him that particular name rather than just calling him another name not to do with his colour?

S: Because I'd heard people calling him that name and I know he gets upset about it, so if I know he gets upset about it, I call him that name.

She continued by mentioning a time when she had called Carole, an Afro-Caribbean girl in her class, 'Blacky'.

RH: Is it different calling Carole say 'Blacky' from calling her 'cow' or something like that?

S: It's not different, it's just a name. If there's a name about someone then you call it them. If you think they are then you call it them.

Some children, like Samantha, used racist remarks only in what they defined as self-defence in 'hot' situations, but saw it as a legitimate strategy in that context.

They had a repertoire of strategies which they applied differentially depending on context. The key criterion for the children was the notion of equality. In situations where the Self was under threat, the maintenance of Self was regarded as equating to the restoration of equality. The use of racist remarks in those situations, therefore, was legitimate because its purpose was not the creation of but the remedying of inequality. So, for example, James explained that racist name-calling was a legitimate tactic if it was used against black children who were aggressive towards you, but illegitimate against other black children. He had said that sometimes people said things like 'chocolate' to Imran.

J: Well he's hit you at school like and you can't hit him back at school really because you'll get the blame as well, so we just go and tell Miss and then he gets into trouble and then after school we say something and he starts calling us white names like 'Icecream' and things and he chases after us [...]

RH: What about other people like in our class, Bindi or Nina or Gurjit, do people call them names about their colour?

J: Not Bindi, no, he's nice Bindi is. I'm not sure about the girls because I don't really bother with the girls, if you know what I mean. But no-one calls Bindi it because he's nice, he doesn't do anything to you so why call him that.

RH: What about if you have an argument with him?

J: Still don't call him that. We just make friends the next day or something.

RH: So what's different about Amjad and Imran that sometimes people call them names about their colour?

J: They're always at you, aren't they, they're always getting you and hitting you and they're violent and that. I don't know, but Bindi is alright, he's kind to you.

#### **Legitimate dominance**

One of the most common explanations that children gave for racist name-calling was that it was motivated by the desire to 'act tough'. This occurred principally outside the friendship group. The subculture of the friendship group comprised values and strategies for preventing and managing conflict and maintaining relatively egalitarian relationships within the group. 'Acting tough' was a term mainly ascribed to boys. It was part of the interactional repertoire for establishing a particular type of male identity through the assertion of dominance. This is Nasar's explanation at Hillside school of why some children used racist name-calling.

N: Because they think they'll look good. They think they're the leaders and they can beat everyone.

RH: And they're trying to prove it are they?

N: Yes.

A boy called Robert at Greenshire school exemplified the 'acting tough' model and the use of what he regarded as legitimate racist name-calling as a strategy of self-assertion over others. Robert was notorious for his aggressive behaviour and had been in trouble on several occasions for racist name-calling.

R: Oh yes, I call them 'Niggers' or 'Pakis' or 'Chocolate biscuit' or something like that. They've got a lot to put up with. If you've fallen out or something and you see something brown or black you go 'Oh look there's your cousin over there', like that.

RH: Does this upset them or annoy them or what?

R: Yes.

Neil, who knew Robert well, described him like this.

He's one of those people that don't like black people. He's about the only person that all the black people in this school don't like. There's a few white people that don't like the odd black person, but it's only natural to not like one person. It's just Robert, he hates every black person. He doesn't mind some of them, like Rajvinder, he plays football with him. But he doesn't really like Rajvinder that much either.

Neil described a recent incident involving Robert and a Sikh boy.

Jagdeep, it was in like circle time when we talk to each other, because we used to watch these films called 'You and Me' and we was watching about boys and girls and name-calling and Robert goes up to Jagdeep and calls him 'Paki' something, 'Bobbie 07', and Jagdeep starts crying and tries beating him up.

Robert's interaction with other children was characterised by aggression. As Neil said, 'Robert is always picking on somebody'. Sometimes it was younger children. Robert described how 'the little ones' had footballs and 'we kept nicking them off them and tripping the little ones over. I loved it'. Katy explained how Robert and another boy picked on girls.

S: Yes they pick on anyone really. They just come up and kick you and call you names. They'll just do anything for no reason. They'll just come up and kick you, whatever they please.

They're that kind of people, you know, just want to show off.

[...] What Robert is going to be at Community School I don't know. There's going to be lots of fights if he carries on like this at primary school, he's going to be in a really bad state, be one of those people, you know, muggings on the street, because he is really bad like that.

RH: Why do you think he does it?

K: Just to have fun because he just likes doing it. It's his way of doing things. When he's bored he thinks 'Well I'll go and do this to the girls' or something.

Physical power and aggressive violence were central to how Robert saw his own identity. On one occasion he was asked him if some people liked arguing.

R: Yes, like me. I love blood and violence, I love it. Where you get all blown to bits and that lot, and you see all the flesh fly in the air and hearts and like that.

He went on to describe in detail, with relish, violent scenes in the Schwarzenegger film *Predator*. Schwarzenegger was his hero, he said.



Acting tough was a common male cultural trait, but it was not restricted to boys, as Raj and Nicholas illustrate here.

RH: When he calls you racist names, or other people do, why do you think they do it? What is in their head?

R: Think they're tough and everything.

N: 'Oh look at me I'm the toughest in the class'. 'I'm going to tease him and get him really worked up'.

RH: But you said that Michelle had called you those names. Was she doing it to show how tough she was or was she doing it for another reason?

R: The same, to show off in front of her friends.

Several children at Greenshire school made the point that some children took pleasure from hurting other children, and their use of racist name-calling was part of a general pattern of behaviour. This is Tracey.

RH: Are there some people who do this, or do all the white children say these things, or just some of them?

T: Some people that pick on everybody does. People who like picking on anybody they can see, anybody they want to pick on, they pick on them. Sometimes they even pick on their friends, they don't realise who they are talking to.

There was an incident at their school in which Claire, an Afro-Caribbean girl, had tried to borrow a rubber from a white boy called Colin and he'd said he only lent it to white people. In a discussion with Claire and two white friends, Lee and Scott, about the incident, they saw it as an instance of Colin's more general disposition, not restricted to racial conflicts.

RH: Why do you think he said that?

S: I don't know, it's just the kind of person he is.

L: He likes upsetting people, he thinks it is a good laugh to upset somebody. [...] He loves hurting feelings.

[...]

C: Because he can upset coloured people except he doesn't hurt white people emotionally, he hits them physically, because you could just be walking along and he'll just do a fly kick on your back, and it really hurts.

### **Conflict between older and younger children**

One form which 'legitimate dominance' took was conflict between older and younger children, as was noted in chapter 7. It was a pervasive and ritualised social process within children's cultures in all three schools in the study. It normally took non-aggressive playful forms, but it could slide into and more aggressive behaviour. Through this ritualised conflict between older and younger children the status hierarchy of children's culture is continuously made and confirmed, and their social identities shaped. When there were black and white children involved, the process often became racialised, though the primary motivation was itself not racist, as Bindi recognised. He was speaking of racist taunts.

B: Not many people say it to me. Only the little kids say it.

RH: Why do they do it?

B: Don't know.

RH: I mean are they just trying to annoy you or what?

B: Probably. Like little kids, they like people chasing them, don't they?

It seemed to be only younger boys who harassed the older boys, but both younger boys and younger girls harassed the older girls. At Woodshire, Hayley and Rebecca were talking about a group of girls in year 4 and Yvette, a black girl in year 6.

H: Rosa she thinks she's tough. She had a go at me at me out there so I pushed her back and I goes 'Stay away from me because if I hit you I'll hit you more than you could hit me' and then Rebecca pulled her away and then Yvette was standing there and she goes 'Stop it Alison and Rosa' and she goes 'No I won't, Paki, golliwog'.

R: They're like a gang.

H: They think they're tough.

The process of challenging and maintaining the status hierarchy between the age groups also took the racialised form of racist name-calling as a means by which older white children dealt with harassment by younger black children. David at Hillside explained that 'if they come up to you and torment you' the 6th year boys will sometimes say 'Go back to your own country' or something'. Two white girls at Hillside school, Victoria and Marion, described how they used racist name-calling as a way of dealing with harassment by Asian girls in the first and second years, and the distinction they made between them and their close friend Baljit. This is Marion.

I think younger children get called quite a lot as well because once they were disturbing me and Baljit so they kept calling us names - not horrible names but they kept disturbing us when we were trying to play, a gang of them came. So we started calling them little names and then they started getting worse so we had to call them 'Pakis' and then they shut up. But they caused that themselves because Baljit doesn't do anything to deserve that but they were just getting on our nerves. We were trying to play a game and they just kept disturbing us and Baljit and they wouldn't let us do anything, and we told the teacher and she told them to go away. We went up the other end of the playground and they just come again.

## CONCLUSION

Conflict between white and black children resulted on occasion in the racialisation of the social processes described in the previous chapter. Name-calling was the most common form that racist behaviour took. It was experienced by all the black children, though with very large differences in frequency, determined mainly by the level of conflict in the social interaction the children typically engaged in. Three codes of racist name-calling were identified: 'illegitimate defence', 'legitimate defence', and 'legitimate dominance'. Each represented a different motivation on the part of the user and a different social meaning to the event, ranging from a heated exchange of names in an argument with a friend, followed by apologies, to the deliberate use of racist name-calling as a dominance-maintaining strategy.

## CHAPTER 9

### BEHAVIOUR AND BELIEFS

In chapter 8 three codes of racialised interaction strategies were identified. This chapter begins by exploring the relationship between these codes and racist attitudes and beliefs, as a basis for a more general examination of the relationship between behaviour and belief in relation to 'race'.

Tricia at Hillside school was typical of many of the children at the three schools, in regarding most racist name-calling, like other forms of name-calling, as purely instrumental, without any necessary underlying racist beliefs. Racist names were no different from other abusive terms. She had been explaining how boys might call girls 'fat cow' if they got in the way of their football game in the playground.

RH: Supposing it was Ghazala who got in the way of their game,  
what might they say to her?

T: They would call her a 'Paki' or a 'burnt sausage' or they'd tell  
her to 'get back to her own country'.

RH: And do you think that is just the same as calling you a 'fat cow'?

T: Yes.

RH: Why would they choose to say that to her and 'fat cow' to you?

T: Because Ghazala is a different colour to me.

RH: But why wouldn't they call her a 'fat cow'?

T: They don't call them 'fat cow' because they are a different colour so they can think of other names that they can't call us because we are white. Might call them 'burnt' names, 'You've been in the sun too long', but they can't call us that because we're white. They call us 'fat cow' because - don't know why but they just call us that - but they call them names because of their colour.

RH: How do you think they choose what name? Do they choose the thing that they think will upset people most or what?

T: They just say the first thing that comes into their head.

RH: If they say that to you is it because they think that all girls are 'cows' or they don't like people who they think are fat? Is that what they really think?

T: No, I just think that they say that name just so you will go off the football pitch and let them carry on with their game, because you'll just go and leave them. Sometimes they just say the first thing that comes into their head.

At the same school, Simon voiced similar views. He was asked if children who used racist name-calling really didn't like black people being in this country.

S: But when I say this, they haven't got such serious feelings about it, they just say it and mocking them and everything. They're not really serious or anything, but they really say it when they get mad or something, or whenever they see them that's what they use against them. The same with Tony, they use against him 'four eyes' and they use against Zabeel 'paki' and if they use against David they use 'titch' or something. Things like that.

RH: So are you saying that calling somebody 'Paki' or 'go back to your own country' is just the same as saying 'four eyes' or 'titch'?

S: Virtually, yes.

RH: How do you know that although people say these things to annoy them or to get their own back or because they are angry,



how do you know that they don't also think that they shouldn't be in this country?

S: The same people who call Zabeel names hang around with coloured people as well.

Simon was asked if he would use racist name-calling against, for example, Kevin, a black boy, if he had an argument with him.

Probably if I had an argument. It's something to use against him isn't it?

Several children said that people who said 'go back to your own country' did not really mean it, they only said it because they were angry or to hurt. Kerry said that in that situation she might say it.

RH: Supposing the government brought in a new law that said that people who were black did have to go and live in another country and that meant Natasha and Yvette and Nina and Gurjit and Imran and so on, what would you think about that?

K: I'd be upset because Natasha and Yvette had to go, and Nina. I'd be upset because I'm their friend and I like playing with them and if I did say 'Go back to your own country' I would regret saying it. I would be really upset because I wouldn't

want Natasha and that to go back and if Hayley did say 'Go back to your own country' they didn't really mean it, they were only saying it to get them back if Natasha said something to them.

RH: So supposing the people who came to take them away said 'Well look this is what you want because we heard you and Hayley saying it', what would you say?

K: That we didn't really mean it, we were just saying it to get them back, we didn't really want them to go, we were just saying it to get them back for what they were saying.

Many of the white children agreed that this was a common motivation for racist name-calling. Paul, also at Hillside school, explained racist name-calling in terms of interactional processes of dominance.

RH: People who call black children names to upset them, do they do it because they think that they are better than black people?

P: They think they're tougher. They think 'Well being as I'm acting tough everybody thinks I'm tough, so I can go and call anybody a name'.

At Greenshire school Nicholas and Jagdeep also thought that racist name-calling was governed primarily by interactional ideologies of 'acting tough', independent from a commitment to racist beliefs.

RH: Do you think that they think that because they're white they're better than you, or is that nothing to do with it?

N: They might think it but I don't think - they might think it. It might cross their minds but I don't think that really has much to do with it.

RH: Really? So what does have to do with it?

J: Acting tough.

This distinction between the instrumental function of racist name-calling and its expressive function - the beliefs about 'race' that the child holds - was made by all the white children. It was also recognised by the black children. This is Sandeep at Greenshire school.

Sometimes people say it but they don't mean it, it just comes out of their mouth.

It was Nina's view too that remarks such as 'Go back to your own country' were only said to hurt, with no necessary commitment to their content.

RH: Why do you think that people say things like that? Do you think that they really do want you to go from this country?

N: I don't think so. They just get angry inside and it just comes out and they say it.

RH: So where do they get this idea from if they don't believe it?

N: They just think of it like people say it. They hear it and they just say it. Because they get angry.

Yvette and Natasha thought the same.

N: They say 'Go back to your own country'. America or somewhere like that - a hot country.

Y: No they say Africa or Jamaica or something like that.

RH: Do you think, I mean it's difficult to say, do you think they really want you to go away or do you think they are just saying that for something to hurt you?

N: They just want to hurt us.

Y: To get at us.

The distinction that children make between the instrumental and expressive functions of racist name-calling is a real one. It is not simply a ritual disclaimer of racist beliefs on the part of white children, a rhetorical strategy used in reporting racist behaviour (van Dijk 1987). It can be represented by the following model. It locates racist name-calling incidents, and by extension other instances of racist behaviour, in relation to two axes. One represents the user's beliefs and attitudes to 'race', ranging from racist to antiracist. The other represents the user's interactional repertoire, which also ranges from racist to non-racist. Individual children may be more or less consistent in both what Billig calls their 'thematic' attitudes and their interactional repertoires.

# THEMATIC

Racist

Use of racist name-calling  
which expresses racist  
attitudes  
- expressive legitimate

Non-use of racist  
name-calling by children  
who have racist attitudes

## INTERACTIONAL

Racist

Non-racist

Use of racist name-calling  
by children who hold racially  
egalitarian beliefs  
- non-expressive illegitimate  
or non-expressive  
legitimate defensive

Non-use of racist  
name-calling by children who hold  
racially egalitarian beliefs  
- illegitimate

Antiracist

The existence of racist beliefs cannot be simply read off from incidents of racist name-calling, any more than racist beliefs automatically generate racist name-calling. Society makes available to children a powerfully charged vocabulary of racist terms, but their use, while trading on the negative meanings that they bear, does not necessarily imply a commitment to the racist ideologies from which they derive. Each incident of choosing to use racist name-calling, or choosing not to use it, needs to be concretely analysed to determine the specific combination of the two

dimensions of ideology and behaviour, thematic and interactional, which it represents.

This model encompasses six racial codes. Each code represents a specific combination of thematic and interactional orientations. The first two codes do not generate racist behaviour, but for very different reasons.

1.        - BELIEF                      - INTERACTION

correspondence of thematic and interactional

children who do not hold racist beliefs and who do not use racist taunts

2.        + BELIEF                      - INTERACTION

contradiction of thematic and interactional

children who hold racist beliefs but do not express them in interaction,

because of fear of retaliation by black children or by teachers

The remaining four codes all generate racist behaviour, but with a range of different meanings for the user. In the next case, the racist behaviour is expressive of racist beliefs.

3.        + BELIEF                      + INTERACTION

expressive legitimate

correspondence of thematic and interactional

children who hold racist beliefs and who regard the use of racist taunts  
as legitimate

In the last three codes, the motivation is primarily interactional rather than  
expressive of racist beliefs. However, the interactional meaning of the behaviour is  
different in each case.

4.        - BELIEF                    + INTERACTION

non-expressive legitimate defensive

contradiction of thematic and interactional

children who do not hold racist beliefs but who regard the use of racist  
taunts as legitimate in situations of 'self-defence' only

5.        - BELIEF                    + INTERACTION

non-expressive illegitimate defensive

contradiction of thematic and interactional

children who do not hold racist beliefs, who regard the use of racist  
taunts as illegitimate, but who use them in 'hot' situations and regret  
doing so

6.        - BELIEF                    + INTERACTION

non-expressive legitimate offensive

contradiction of thematic and interactional



children who do not hold racist beliefs but who regard the use of racist taunts as legitimate in situations of assertion of dominance

This is not to say that non-expressive racist name-calling (i.e. the use of racist names by children that is not expressive of racist beliefs), is not racist. It is racist in two other senses. First, it is a form of hurtful discrimination against black children. Secondly, it trades on a racist frame of reference and thus tends to reinforce its legitimacy within children's culture. Just because an instance of racist name-calling was understood as not expressing underlying racist beliefs did not make it any more acceptable to black children, as Parminder made clear at Greenshire school:

If somebody called me a name like 'Paki' or something, why don't they tighten their mouth right, they should have been thinking what they were saying. Whether they said it on purpose or not. You should think what you are saying.

#### **EVIDENCE OF RACIST BELIEFS**

The emphasis in the extant literature, as seen earlier, is on the prevalence of racist attitudes amongst white children. While the present study confirms that many white children hold racist views, it needs to also be borne in mind that a significant proportion of white children hold considered views which are explicitly antiracist, typified by the position of Sarah at Greenshire school.

Underneath it doesn't matter what colour skin you are. You've got skin, you've got blood, you've got bones, you're just ordinary children, you're just the same, cos if I had brown skin I would still be the same person, but with just a different coloured skin.

Her view was echoed by Gemma, who belonged to a large group of girls at Woodshire school. 'Most of our gang like black or other different kinds of people. We don't mind what colour they are'. However, many children, black and white, acknowledged that some white children, perhaps a minority, perhaps a majority, had racist beliefs. By far the most common explanation given by black children, like Kevin at Hillside school, was to do with 'belonging to this country'.

RH: Why do you think so many white people think like this and behave like this?

K: Because they think this is their country and that we should go back to our own country. Like they say to Pakistanis.

Mandeep, a girl at Greenshire school, saw the relationship of prejudiced attitudes to a history of domination. 'White people, they think they're better than coloured people. They think they rule the world, but they can't'.

Most of the white children agreed that some white children had racist beliefs. There was a range of explanations suggested by them. Steven at Hillside school said:

Well they don't like other people coming to England and because they keep coming and bringing their families and they are trying to make a living in England, and most white people can't buy shops because all the other foreign people have, they start thinking that they are all going to come to invade them, and they start calling them names and telling them to go back to their own country and make up jokes about them.

Ben at Woodshire thought that 'They just think it's not so good to be brown. They think white is better', and Simon added 'It's just like some men think they're better than women. I think it's just like that'.

Some children thought that the cause lay in cultural conflict. Tanya at Hillside school said that 'Some people don't like the food they eat, some call them names because they read the Koran and we read the Bible and some people just call them names because they talk different languages and they go 'Bud, bud, bud' and try to do languages'. Steven at the same school thought that some white people did not like black people 'because of their skin. It's a different colour', but also because they were envious of black culture. 'They've got different cultures and stuff like that, and probably white people are jealous of it. So they make up names'.

Racist views were not expressed in interview as an explicit and elaborated statement of principle in the way that antiracist views often were. There is no evidence that this was an artefact of the research situation; in other words that the children had coherent racist views which they might elaborate among themselves but not to an

adult. No evidence was forthcoming either as the personal expression of children's views in the interview situation or in reports by children of other children.

Expressions of racist views, whether held by the respondent or reported, were partial and fragmented, and to a great extent context-bound and embedded in social interaction. They were often combined with expressions of racial egalitarianism. The fluid, heterogeneous, and sometimes contradictory nature of children's common sense consciousness of 'race' will be examined in detailed case-studies of children in the next chapter.

Earlier chapters have covered the key social processes governing children's peer interaction. The remaining part of this chapter examines how other typical social processes of children's culture, apart from name-calling, may become racialised by both interactional and thematic ideologies of 'race'.

### **Assertion of group identity**

Assertion of group identity is a central feature of children's culture. The assertion of their ethnic social identity by black children produced both positive and negative responses on the part of white children. For example, at Greenshire school Mandeep reported how children had responded to her wearing Indian clothes. She said that she only wore them to school on special occasions, for instance if they were doing a topic on India. When she and her friends wore them for a Bhangra event, 'they go "I like your suits" and all that. Like nearly all the girls said they like it'. Mandeep said that girls and boys 'said the music was good. Like Nicola, she joined in. If we had

all Indians in it, it would be sort of like racist, and we put some English people in it'. But she said that wearing Indian clothes also provoked some hostile remarks. 'They sometimes show off, yes. Say if we wear this suit like, with some buttons to it and a top like. We wear them and they say "English clothes are better" and they say "From Indian it's chronic, all those things"'.

Remarks like these illustrate how racialised social categories can structure competitive personal interaction. As has been suggested earlier, the power of racist beliefs lies in their ability to make apparent sense of everyday life. In a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy, they receive continual reinforcement through their use as an interpretive framework. Episodes of personal interaction are explained by elements of racist ideologies, and in turn serve as further proof of their validity. For example, each instance of assertion by black children can be located in the interpretive framework supplied by racist notions of national identity and black people 'taking over'. In the following discussion Samantha, a white girl at Greenshire school, responds in this way both to an assertion of black cultural values, and to a simple act of assertion that has no connection with 'race' other than that the boy who does it is black. The negative evaluation she gives to his act of attempted dominance is racialised into further evidence for her negative evaluation of black people. We were talking about a discussion we had had previously.

RH: You said 'This morning Mandeep who is on the same table as us and Parminder they kept on saying Indian songs are better than English songs'. Why were they doing that?

S: I don't know. Suppose because they're Indian and we're not so they think that theirs is better than ours but it's not. We don't understand theirs, they understand ours. They do some in PE. I'd rather do country dancing though.

RH: 'And I thought like saying "Well why do you come to live in this country then, it makes me mad"', you said.

S: Yes, because if they think theirs is better than ours then I don't know why they bother living here. I'm not that racist but I like some Indian people but I don't like others. I don't like Parvinder because he really acts like he owns the country. He tells you what to do. I got the microscope the other day and he took it off me. He looked at it and he wasn't using it and I took it off him and he goes 'Oi that was mine' and goes and tells Mr. A [*the class teacher*] that I've got to give it him back. That's what gets me mad about him.

The expression of Asian cultures that provoked the greatest amount of comment from white children was the use of Asian languages. Parminder at Greenshire school explained that

I nearly always in class talk in Indian to Mandeep or anybody else. Sometimes to English people I go [*she spoke in Punjabi*] something like

that - that means 'Come here' to somebody. If they're English they don't know what I'm on about sometimes.

Katherine, a girl in her class, said that this made her feel like saying racist remarks.

They're always speaking Indian and you never know what they are talking about. You say 'What are you talking about?' and then they start swearing to us in a different language and we're going 'What are you saying, what are you saying?'

The competitive character of children's culture, with its constant pressure on children to maintain themselves in the face of attempted dominance, led children to interpret the use of Asian languages as a possible dominance strategy. There was a rational element in their belief. Rafaqat at Hillside school described how when he played with Pakistani friends in the playground they usually spoke in Urdu in order to exclude and perhaps provoke white children, 'Because they don't know what we are saying then if we speak Urdu'. This sometimes led to bilingual exchanges of verbal abuse.

David, a white boy at the same school, thought that using Asian languages gave children an unfair advantage in another way:

if they're getting done and you're getting done they can walk away and say something to the teacher in Pakistan language like a swear name, and the teacher won't know what they are saying, but if we said it they would know what we were saying and then we would get done.

The views of David, Katherine and Samantha are not necessarily primarily motivated by racist beliefs. The key process at work here is at the level of the culture of interaction, which is governed by a relatively inflexible principle of equality. The ever-present threat of dominance makes children very sensitive to any perceived breach of the equality principle. The consequent uneasiness that they feel about the use of Asian languages follows from this. For some children, like Katherine, it coexists with a belief in racial equality. For others however, like Samantha, any assertion of ethnic identity reinforces the racist beliefs that she holds.

### **Racist gossip**

A form of racist behaviour not so far considered is remarks between white children which black children are not intended to hear. While these serve the interactional function of reinforcing inclusion, they may also reveal underlying beliefs.



Baljit, a girl at Hillside school, was explaining that she was not called racist names very often. She said that it hadn't happened at all that term. Her two white friends, Marion and Victoria, joined in the discussion.

M: They did behind her back last week. They started calling you names when you had gone to the teacher to ask about your maths, they started looking at your book and saying horrible things like 'Look at the Paki writing' and things like that, because she's got a different sort of writing.

V: She writes big and me and Marion write really tiny.

The following account by Katherine at Greenshire school reveals both racist beliefs and behaviour among her friends and her own ambivalence.

K: Well most times I don't call people racist names now because for one thing if my mum found out that I was saying racist names she would absolutely kill me, because my mum has got a best friend and she is black and I really, really like her, and so I didn't really say racist names very often. It's just if they really got me mad and things. I didn't really call people racist names. I didn't say it in front of their faces, if you know what I mean, I said it to Nicola and all them lot and those lot say it, and I felt like saying to them 'Just pack it in because you wouldn't like it'

because I can remember when Kirsty, Gillian and me were going round, this was the other day, and I just stopped doing it and Gillian and Katy carried on, because I didn't like what they were saying. Because we were talking about - I don't know what they were talking about, I just heard them talking because we were all working together and Gillian and Kirsty were talking. And then they started saying 'Let's all have a packet of brown shoe polish' and all this stuff. They started shouting 'A barrel of brown shoe polish' and then Claire started singing it and she's black and she didn't know what they were talking about at all.

RH: Were they talking about people in our class?

K: No - I know what we were talking about! Esther, my friend, her auntie has just got married to a black man and they're going to have a half caste child and I was saying that I think half caste children are dead dead sweet, and then they said 'I don't think they are when they get older' and I said 'I think that they are' and they started saying 'A barrel of shoe polish'.

For black children who became aware that their friends might make racist remarks behind their backs, it put into question the nature of their friendship as well as their apparent non-racism, as Zabeel found.

RH: So you thought that people had stopped calling you names?

Z: Yes then after that I heard people call me names. Like say Martin makes fun, say a Muslim or an Indian can't talk very good he goes '....' [*Zabeel put on a mock-Indian accent*] and he makes fun and then he goes 'That's a bit like Zab'. I don't want to hit Mark and then after he's a good mate. And one day Paul, there was these Muslim girls, and the ball went over there and he never knew I was there because if I was there he wouldn't have called them anything, and he said 'Hey you niggers pass me the ball' and when he saw me he goes 'Oh oo, I never said it to you Zab'.

RH: And that was Paul. He's another of your friends?

Z: Yes he's my friend but you see, I don't know if he's my friend or anything because behind my back he just calls the Muslims, my friends, names. I don't get it sometimes.

Zabeel's apprehensions that there was a climate of racist attitudes among some of the children in the class, including some of his friends in the group of boys, received some confirmation from remarks made in interview, separately, by three children in his class (and not made by children at either of the two other schools). Tricia said:

T: Ghazala came to my house one day and she stayed to tea and she went home about 7.30 and people started calling me names the day after because she had come round to my house.

RH: Did they? What did they say?

T: They said I'm a 'Paki lover' because Ghazala comes round to my house and we play. They say horrible things and say if I want to play with them I should have been a different colour, I shouldn't have been the colour I am.

RH: Who said these things?

T: Simon, Liam. Because everything Simon says Liam agrees with him. I think if Simon wasn't there Liam wouldn't bother about them.

RH: So what did you say to them?

T: I just told them not to be so stupid. I just say 'Well I'm not that colour am I. You don't have to be their friends if you don't want to but I am'. Because Jennie feels the same way as I do, she's not bothered about their colour.

Independently, Steven, a boy in her class, said the same thing. He had been giving his own views, which were decidedly antiracist, but he said that he had not talked to other children about them.

S: No, kept it to myself up to now, because other people think I'm going dotty because I like black people more than I do white.

RH: What other people think that?

S: Lots of people probably. All the big kids, they all think they are horrible, and just keep thinking about themselves and not other people.

At the same school was Charlotte, who was the most socially aware and of all the white children studied at that school, and who articulately expressed her own antiracist views. She was a member of the 'granny group' of girls, and she was asked if she had discussed her views on 'race' with them.

C: I don't tell anyone.

RH: Why not?

C: People might...I've heard it on telly calling them 'Paki lover' and everything like that.

RH: Might they? So why does it worry you being called 'Paki lover'?

C: Because they might not be my friends.

[...]

RH: Is that because they don't like black people?

C: No. [*i.e. No they don't*]

RH: How do you know they don't like them?

C: Because in the playground they just talk like 'Pakis' [*said contemptuously*] as though they're a piece of dirt, it's really horrible.

RH: Do you ever say anything or do you keep quiet?

C: Keep quiet.

Charlotte did not share her ideas with her friends because, echoing the remarks earlier of Steven and Tricia at the same school, she suspected that they might call her a 'Paki-lover'. This fear was a powerful censor because of the way in which it

could be used against her as a weapon in the war of 'negative gossip' that regulated their friendship relations. It is an example of how racism is taken up, animated and amplified by peer group social processes. This is the dilemma she was caught in.

Sometimes I can't always understand myself because I tell someone but then it's my own fault because instead of telling them I just shut up. I don't know why. Say I tell Sarah and then Sarah tells Vicky, and Vicky will tell... and then it will go all round the school.

Charlotte explained that she thought that her friends had racist views. 'They think Pakistani people are different, they're not human beings, just because they're black.' But they didn't make racist remarks to black children, for two reasons. One was that they did not want to get into trouble. The other was that they treated black children in the class as exceptions. Charlotte found this contradiction difficult to understand.

C: I don't really understand it because they are always talking about 'Pakis' but the next minute they're playing with Zabeel and Ghazala and Kevin. It's very confusing. One minute they don't like them and the next minute they are playing with them.

RH: Are you saying that sometimes they don't like Kevin or Zabeel, or are you saying that they always like them and when they talk about West Indians or 'Pakis' they are thinking about other people?

C: Yes, they're thinking about other people. They think that about 'Pakis' but they think that Zabeel is like us, that Zabeel's white and they treat him as though he's white.

### Exclusion

As has been noted earlier, friendship relations among the children showed little evidence of being affected by ethnic criteria. Friendship groups were often mixed. Black children often had close best friends who were white. However, there were all-white friendship groups, inevitably so because of the small proportion of black children. It was difficult to tell if racial exclusion was a factor in the composition of these groups, though no evidence to that effect was found. Exclusionary processes within a group which are not the result of explicit decisions by group members, and which are not accompanied by any expression of racist opinions, are extremely difficult to identify. It is possible that processes of silent exclusion, based on shared tacit, and perhaps unformulated, understandings, were at work. However, none of the black children, who were generally perceptive about racist undercurrents in children's relationships and behaviour, made any mention of exclusionary practices either experienced by themselves or directed at other black children. Many of the white children were also quite perceptive in their interpretations of other children's attitudes, and the absence of statements by white children about black children being excluded by white children from activities and relationships is also indicative.



It is significant that the area of children's culture where there was some evidence of processes of exclusion at work was that most subject to regulation by parents. A small number of children reported incidents of black children being excluded from playing at home with white children by white parents. A discussion with Karen, a white girl at Greenshire school, is particularly interesting not only because it provides evidence of exclusion but also because it reveals her in the process of working out her ideas as she talked. This was the second interview but the first time that 'race' had been mentioned. The discussion was about arguments between children and she was asked if sometimes black people and white people argued. Karen's response was to reflect on an act of racial discrimination by her friend Lorna's father, and to come to the realisation that she had colluded in Lorna's racism. The disjointed syntax indicates that these are ideas in the process of formation as she speaks.

K: I think at one point Lorna's dad, I don't think he likes blacks - I don't know - but Lorna never has no blacks to her birthday or anything. Because of that Lorna you know she's like - if her dad don't like them she won't - well actually she hangs around with - I don't know, but she couldn't invite those to her birthday party. But that ain't right because she invited - well that was yonks ago in the first year of this school. But she said to me that if you invite any like Mandeep or Sandeep I won't come to your birthday. Now I was stupid then because I used to be all

over Lorna and if anything she said I would do it, because I did this.

RH: Why do you think that was stupid?

K: Because you shouldn't say that. Blacks are just the same as other people. And anyway - is that blackmail - kind of blackmail isn't it? And anyway because they're black, they're only a different colour. I've always got along with black people. Sir do you know why some people hate blacks, because now I'm getting a funny feeling in my tummy and it's getting mad why people hate them. It's getting mad like people kill people. I can't understand that. Some people do though. Do you know why some people hate blacks?

RH: I was going to ask you the same question.

K: I don't know why.

#### **ROMANCE AND 'RACE'**

Perhaps the area of children's cultures in which racialised exclusionary processes were most pervasive was that of romance relationships. Again, it is significant that this is an area of children's cultures and identities most vulnerable to parental

influence and intervention. The school in which romance relationships were most developed was Greenshire, and it will serve as a case-study.

There were a minority of black children in the two top classes: 15 out of 67. All were of Indian or Pakistani descent, apart from two Afro-Caribbean girls. They were represented throughout the subcultural spectrum in the classes, from a small group of girls who were regarded as 'goody goodies' to members of the high-status mixed-sex group. Thus, like the white children, some of the black habitually played with the opposite sex, others never did. None of the black children outside the mixed group had had boyfriends or girlfriends. Of those in the mixed group, one of the two Afro-Caribbean girls had had boyfriends, the other hadn't. There were three instances of Asian boys going out with white girls. There was only one instance of an Asian girl - Brenda - going out with boys, of whom one was Asian, one white. Apart from that there were no instances of a white boy going out with an Asian girl.

Some of the Asian girls were seen as 'goody goodies' and therefore, like white goody goodies, would not be candidates for girlfriends, as Anthony explains.

A: If you don't go out with people you're not in that gang and if you can't go out with someone - I don't know. If you're in that gang you're alright and if you're not in the gang you're not going out with anyone. People don't go out with Aina and Akwinder because they are goody goodies. They never get told off.

These girls, like the white girls in the girls' group, said they did not want boyfriends. There was a significant difference in the reasons they gave, however. For the white girls in the girls' group it was a question of age: they were too young now, but they would have boyfriends later. But some of the Asian girls, such as Aina here, opposed the whole idea of having boyfriends.

RH: So you haven't got a boyfriend? Do you think you will have?

A: No.

RH: Why not?

A: Well I don't really want one. I don't think it is right to have boyfriends.

RH: Why do you think it is not right?

A: I mean having a boyfriend you might break up with someone else and go to another one, another boyfriend. I don't like people going out with boys. Having boyfriends and girlfriends.

RH: So what will happen especially when you get to the secondary school a year after now? Will it be that lots of your white

friends, like Natalie, will be having boyfriends then and you won't?

A: Yes I think it will be like that because most people just go off with boys.

Other Asian children did have boyfriends or girlfriends, even in opposition to their parents, as Kuldip admits.

K: Yes, I've had one even though my parents don't let me. It's against our religion. I don't really go out with girls, but I went out with her.

The only Asian girl who had boyfriends was Brenda. For her, the freedom to have boyfriends if she wished was part of a more general rejection of the authority of her traditionally-minded grandparents who brought her up, which led her to explicitly disavow her ethnicity. According to Parminder,

S: Brenda, she wants to be English. She goes 'I wish I was English'.

There may be cultural reasons why Asian girls may prefer to go out with Asian boys. This is Parminder, who secretly fancied Parvinder.

S: If I married an Indian person they could... It would be different for me because I wouldn't be able to speak Indian, so I wouldn't really marry an English person because I can speak Indian and they might not be able to.

RH: Would that make a big difference?

S: Yes because I nearly always in class talk in Indian to Mandeep or anybody else.

Some children, in discussing which children would make suitable pairs, automatically used ethnic criteria. The roots of this categorisation system were not specifically racial: it drew on wider, idiosyncratic, notions held by some of the children that similarity in appearance was an indication of personal compatibility. For example, this is Sarah talking about romance relationships between white girls and boys.

I think what it is is most of the time if they've both got the same coloured hair they stick with each other for quite a long time, but if they're like different coloured hair then they suddenly change.

On the same grounds, one white girl was thought to be a suitable partner for one Asian boy because she was quite suntanned. For some children, differences in

appearance between children of different ethnic groups in the class inevitably became assimilated to these notions of natural affinity based on appearance.

Some white children said that some white girls and boys would not go out with black children because they were racist. Anthony explained why white girls were not as attracted to two Asian boys, who were among the leading members of the mixed group, as they were to white boys.

A: Yes, because of the colour of Raj and Par, they're the strongest, it's just because of their colour. If they were English like I were and were white then people would tend to go for them more because they are the strongest and if they were white it would be a lot better.

Some white parents had expressed disapproval of their children going out with black children. This is Leanne.

L: I've heard like Nathan he's not allowed to go out with coloured people.

RH: You say that Nathan isn't allowed to. Who by?

L: His mum says 'If you come home with a coloured person...'.  
Because his mum's dead racist.

Children did not necessarily agree with or act in accordance with their parents' racist views, as Nicola shows.

RH: In your group people are all friends and some are black and some are white. When it comes to boyfriends and girlfriends, does it make a difference there, do you think?

N: No because I like Raj. Like I were mucking around and saying like the top ten who you liked. He would probably would be my third. I would go out with him if like I asked him and he said yes. I wouldn't really care if he was Indian, but my dad don't like me going out with Indian people. He just don't like them.

As these extracts demonstrate, the complex relationship between 'race' and 'romance' was mediated by three types of social processes. The first was non-racial in origin: the exclusion of some black girls, like some of the white girls, from romance relationships on the grounds that they were 'goodies'; and the use of appearance criteria including those related to ethnic group. The second was cultural factors affecting the behaviour of black children: opposition to having boyfriends or girlfriends; parental disapproval; language compatibility. The third was racism by white children, which also had the potential to racialise the other two types and translate cultural differences, whether in terms of ethnic cultures or peer-group cultures, into the discourses of racism. The cross-cutting of these processes of 'race'



and gender formation gave rise to contradictory dynamics of social differentiation and integration within children's cultures. They serve to marginalise some black children from the mainstream subculture of romance. But equally cross-'race' romance relationships offer a powerful rebuttal to processes of racialisation within children's cultures. These dynamics will tend to be amplified as the children moved into secondary schools and mainstream youth cultures of romance (see Hewitt 1986, Jones 1988), as is indicated by a snatch of conversation overhead just outside Greenshire primary school between some white pupils at the local secondary school. It was about another girl and her boyfriend. One said gleefully: 'Clare's packed him in for a nignog'. 'What, you mean a Paki?'. 'Yes'. The implications of 'race' for romance relationships in the secondary school will be examined in chapter 11.

## CONCLUSION

There was no one-to-one mapping of racist behaviour and racist beliefs. Racist beliefs might be held without the child engaging in racist behaviour, and racist behaviour might take place without being the expression of racist beliefs. Some children held racist beliefs and engaged in racist behaviour: others did neither. Children's beliefs and behaviour in this respect were governed by two ideological ensembles. One - a 'thematic' ideology of 'race' - comprised their social knowledge, attitudes and values concerning issues of 'race'. The other - an 'interactional' ideology - comprised the social knowledge, attitudes, values and strategies which governed their peer relationships and social interaction. Where the two ideologies overlapped was where the child was faced with acting in racialised situations.

In terms of racist name-calling it was possible to identify six racial interaction codes, each representing a different configuration of combinations of the two ideological repertoires.

Three sets of social processes were identified as being particularly revealing of racist beliefs. One was the assertion of group identity by black children; a second was racist 'gossip' between white children. A third, and particularly complex area, was that of 'romance' relationships.

## CHAPTER 10

### CASE STUDIES

In this chapter four case-studies of the racialisation of children's cultures are explored in detail. The first focuses on one specific racist incident, comprising a series of episodes in the relationships of a group of boys over a period of a few days. The second case-study situates one incident in the wider context of a white girl's life-experiences and examines the meanings that they give to it. The third case-study looks at a series of incidents in the life of one white boy and the interpretations he makes of them. The final case-study examines the relationships between four girls, two white, two black, and the extent to which their friendships are racialised.

#### THE 'SALMAN RUSHDIE' INCIDENT

One day the class teacher at Woodshire school reported that there had been some trouble concerning a group of four boys who shared a table, Bindi, Imran, Richard and Simon. During the incident the name 'Salman Rushdie' had been used as a taunt. That same day I interviewed the four boys individually about the incident. Two weeks later I spoke to the group together and said that I wanted to try and sort out with them jointly what had happened. (The delay in suggesting this to them was caused by the absence of Bindi from school). I made it clear that no question of

blame was involved. They agreed and we worked on it for two sessions, one on the same day and the second a week later, when a further session also took place involving Simon, Bindi and Amjad, Imran's twin brother in the parallel class.

The method adopted was to produce a flow-chart of the relevant events. Each event was discussed, a version was agreed, and it was written on a small piece of paper which was then glued onto a large sheet, with arrows linking the events. This method was successful in both focusing the discussion and maintaining the motivation of the group.

The evidence collected consists of individual interviews with the four boys and the flow-chart narrative produced collectively by the four boys and Amjad. The discussion that took place while we produced the collective narrative was recorded on tape. I shall not draw on it here, but what it demonstrates very clearly is that arriving at an agreed version of an event is an extremely complex and time-consuming process. There are differences between each of the boys' versions, and there are areas of confusion which were not able to be resolved. There are four main reasons for this. The first is that the participants do not have complete and accurate recall of what took place. The second is that they all had different locations within the events. The third is that both the participation of the boys in the events, and their recall of them, is structured by their own specific attitudes and interests. These may include quite conscious, as well as unconscious, attempts to bias the narrative in order, for example, to present themselves to me in a favourable light. Having said that, an examination of the evidence indicates that they were frank about telling

me what happened and about revealing their own attitudes and actions. The principal difficulty in producing a complete account is the fourth one: simply the enormous complexity and multiple connectedness of everyday events. The flow-chart narrative was a very simplified version. The individual transcripts go into greater detail on a number of points, and contain a number of references to other related events which I was scarcely able to explore. In other words, the Salman Rushdie incident is one specific expression of a set of elements which constitute the culture of the children concerned, which have a history and which continuously re-express themselves in familiar yet never identical configurations. Those elements comprise the biographies and personalities of the participants, the characteristic social processes of peer group relations, and those aspects of the wider social context, ideological and experiential, which impinge upon them.

The 'Salman Rushdie incident' came to the attention of the class teacher when Imran, a Muslim boy, complained that other boys on his table were saying 'Salman Rushdie' to him as a taunt. In our joint discussion it became evident that the issue of Salman Rushdie first entered their consciousness some days previously in a discussion at the dinner table (see the flow-chart). The source of their information was the television news. The white children as well as the Asian had a fairly accurate grasp of the issue and its significance, and Simon's interpretation that Rushdie was a Sikh criticising Muslims is understandable.

RH: Why do you think Imran is upset or angry about people saying 'Salman Rushdie'?

S: Well for one because Salman Rushdie wrote a book called The Satanic Verses and it's supposed to have things against their religion because Salman Rushdie is a Sikh, I think so anyway. So of course Bindi being a Sikh and Salman Rushdie being a Sikh and Imran being a Muslim because of the book Satanic Verses, it upsets him. Because they are a strong religious family, Imran's family.

Once 'Salman Rushdie' had entered into circulation in the children's world it became available to be used as part of the typical social processes of peer interaction: in particular, as a means to both exert power and have fun. It was first taken up in this way by David Gill, a Sikh boy, to use against Amjad, a Muslim boy. David has a reputation for compulsive name-calling. Before this incident he was calling everyone 'honkey'. The consensus recorded on the flow-chart is that he is 'mental' ('tatu' in Punjabi). Though said apparently in fun, the taunt of 'Salman Rushdie' set off a typical process of conflict escalation. Amjad retaliated by saying 'shut up, Gilly Willy'. David, realising that saying 'Salman Rushdie' had succeeded in provoking Amjad, repeated the taunt, and Amjad then kneed him 'where it hurts most', as Simon put it.

The second scene in the story concerns the formation of a bhangra dance group at the school, in which several of the children, including white children, were involved. They wanted to exclude Amjad because he was disruptive. At this point it should be noted that Amjad is generally regarded as the toughest boy in the school, and is

continually harassing other children. Another conflict escalation ensued. Amjad retaliated by saying that the bhangra group would be 'rubbish', David repeated his previous successful taunt of 'Salman Rushdie', and Amjad responded in kind, by taunting him with 'Guru Nanak'.

At this point white children were drawn in, through the process of being used by other children as intermediaries in disputes. David appears to have deliberately got Andrew, and Bindi, a Sikh boy, to say 'Salman Rushdie' to Amjad, thus reinforcing his offensive. Also at this point Imran, Amjad's twin brother, with a similar reputation, got involved. Imran heard Andrew say 'Salman Rushdie' to Amjad so he told Mary to say 'Guru Nanak' to Bindi. Bindi then said 'Salman Rushdie' to Imran.

The next scene took place during a lesson. Richard and Simon sit at the same table as Bindi and Imran. An argument started, either because Richard asked Imran for a spelling and Imran gave the wrong spelling, or because, according to Imran, 'We were sitting down and we were painting and Richard spoilt our paint and I just called him a name and he said 'Salman Rushdie' to me'. Whichever version is correct, Richard retaliated by using the 'Salman Rushdie' taunt and Simon then picked it up. A bout of name-calling then took place, leading to the teacher intervening.

The question that is posed is what these events meant to the participants.

Racist name-calling is part of a broader repertoire of verbal abuse. It was articulated with two other favourite themes of children's name-calling. One was directed at physical attributes, as Bindi reported:

And then in the dinner canteen he said that Pardeep was fat so I said he's fat [*i.e. Amjad*], he couldn't do a press up, and he said that Pardeep couldn't do one so I said that he couldn't do one. Neither of them could do them. He was making fun of Pardeep and I was making fun of him.

The other theme is that of abuse concerning the family, in this case unfavourable comparisons of wealth, as Richard explained:

R: Bindi called him it [*Salman Rushdie*] because Imran was saying some things about his family and then Bindi came out with saying it 'What about your family then?' They did that.

RH: What sort of things did Imran say about Bindi's family?

R: Oh, what happened - Imran says he gets loads of money every day and then Bindi says 'Bet you don't, you can't afford a mountain bike' and arguing over that and then Bindi said 'Salman Rushdie' and Simon started to say it...



For Simon, 'Salman Rushdie' was valuable as a strategy to compensate for the habitual dominance of Imran:

S: ...he was quite upset and so now every time he offends us or any one of your friends, we used to say 'Salman Rushdie' to him. In a way to get our own back and also to keep him away because then he would keep away from us for the day. He is quite a strong boy, he is stronger than anyone else in this class and the whole school and so we get on with him as a friend but if he tries to hurt us, he probably does because he is very strong, so we were all saying 'Salman Rushdie' to him if he started to offend us.

It was functional in that it achieved, at least in some situations, a victory over Imran.

RH: And what did Imran do when Bindi said 'Salman Rushdie' to him?

S: He just left him alone.

RH: Why did he leave him alone, because he was upset or annoyed?

S: He was upset and he knew that if he did anything to him he was just going to keep saying it, so he would get more and more upset. So he just left him alone.

Amjad and Imran share a reputation as the toughest boys in the school, a reputation which they continually try to prove. Bindi says that one of the starting-points of the Salman Rushdie incident was Amjad 'acting tough':

B: It was Amjad. He started saying that he was tough and strong...  
[...] He said that he could beat me and Pardeep up really badly.  
[...] He said he could probably beat anyone up in the school and he kept saying it and I think some people started laughing so when we got outside I just started calling him names because he started. At first I called him a name...

RH: You called Amjad a name?

B: Yes because he started saying that he was stronger than me...

There is evidence that the experience of racism plays a part in Imran's compulsion to act tough. Richard said that he is sometimes called racist names by other children:

RH: Have people called Imran before, not Salman Rushdie, but perhaps other things when they have had an argument?

R: Well some people do.

RH: What sort of things?

R: Blackie and ice-cream.

RH: Ice-cream?

R: Choc ice, and then Imran calls them names back and then once somebody says something to Imran now he comes out and starts hitting them.

Richard gave an example. A few days previously in the playground, 'Imran got in the way of Jason and Jason started to swear and call him 'Get out the way you black' s.. word, and then Jason kicked him and then Imran started hitting him back'. According to Imran, such incidents were not infrequent. The brothers also have a whole set of experiences of racism that they and their family have been involved in outside school. Imran told me of an incident in his father's cafe where a white boy had called him a 'Paki' and a physical struggle had ensued. He also described racist graffiti that was written on their shop window and nearby walls.

Two different but overlapping frames of reference are in use, and Simon and Richard on the one hand and Imran on the other are positioned differently with respect to them. For Simon and Richard, the dominant frame of reference was that

of the relations of power within the group, and specifically the dominance of Imran. For Imran, racism meant a whole set of experiences specific to him, not only because of his ethnicity, but also because he had experiences of racism outside school which are beyond the horizon of the two white boys' worlds.

## **JACKY**

Jacky is a white girl who was a member of the large group of girls at Woodshire school. The discussion begins with her account of a racist name-calling incident between her and Nina, an Indian girl in the same group, that took place over a year before, and explores her views about 'race' that underlie it.

I think I said 'Why don't you go back to where you come from' and just called her a 'Paki' and she called me an 'Ice cream' and a 'blob'.

Jacky is quite a large girl. She was asked why she had chosen to call Nina 'Paki'.

She called me 'Ice cream' which means fatty, then I just thought well she's not fat so what can I call her, well she's black so I'll call her 'Blackie'.

Afterwards they made friends. In a separate discussion Nina was asked about the incident. She saw it as probably not expressive of underlying racist beliefs.

RH: Why did Jacky call you a name? Is it because Jacky doesn't really like Asian people, or...

N: She is nice to me like. She does take me swimming and stuff. She's not bad but she just called me the name, probably because I were having an argument and I were just calling each other names and she called me that.

RH: You mean that she probably doesn't really think that?

N: She probably didn't mean it.

Jacky's use of racist name-calling was not the expression of racist beliefs in a simple and unmediated way. In order to understand it, it is necessary to situate it first of all in the friendship relations among the group of girls to which she and Nina belonged. Jacky said that she and Nina often had arguments.

Well me and Nina aren't close. I always argue. I always have loads of fights. We're still friends but we're not close friends like all the others are.

The arguments with Nina were more serious than with others in the group. Among the other girls, they managed conflict by walking away from each other before the argument escalated to name-calling.

When me and the others start fighting I just break up, but me and Nina carry on. Like I think that if I don't carry on Nina will think I'm a chicken, because if you walk off from Nina she goes 'Chicken, chicken' and starts calling you that, so I don't walk off her. But when I'm with Hannah I just walk off together, and Jayne, because I know that I am going to really fall out, I just separate, and then after a few hours I make up again.

The failure of the normal de-escalation technique may have been due to a more aggressive approach that Nina took in arguments. In interview, other girls in the group criticised her for being too dominant. But the causes of the conflicts lay deeper, in the competition for relationships among the girls in the group, and Jacky's fear of exclusion. This is Nina's explanation.

RH: Is Jacky a friend of yours?

N: Yes, she's one of my best friends but I don't get on well with her. Well none of us get on well with her.

RH: Why is that?

N: Because if I start walking together and talking to each other and telling each other secrets she starts crying. I don't know why

but I say 'We'll tell you after' and she just goes 'Well I'm not your friend' and she starts crying.

RH: Is that because you're leaving her out of things?

N: Well I weren't leaving her out, I were just talking to each other and she thought that I were leaving her out.

RH: Does this happen quite a lot?

N: Yes.

RH: Is that because she'd like to be really best friends do you think, more than she is at the moment?

N: I think she wants to be more than any of us.

Jacky reveals her insecurity with friendship relations in the group in her remarks about her relationship with Hannah, her best friend.

J: When she is with other people I think she tends to be really hard. When she's on her own she's really nice. And that is when I mostly fall out, when she is with somebody else and I am in a group of three or four, because she starts just laughing

like all the life is shut up inside, and then when other people go away she just opens the gate and she's nice again.

RH: When you say she is hard, what do you mean?

J: It's like when she is with people, not her mum or dad or her brother, when she is with her other friends, just like she changes. Like she gets a hard coating on the outside like gates, and then when she is with me she just opens the gates and cuts the hard coating and she's nice when she is with one person. [...] When I'm with Hannah I feel more relaxed but when I'm with a group of people I feel that I have to do things right or they will laugh at me. When I'm with one person I know that I can trust Hannah, I just feel alright.

In this context, Jacky explains why she and Nina do not get on in terms of incompatible characteristics, of which 'race' is one.

J: We've just got nothing in common at all.

RH: How do you mean you've got nothing in common, like what?

J: Like I'm fat, she's thin. I'm white, she's black. She doesn't do anything that I do. She doesn't listen to music. She likes Bros



group and I hate it. She plays football and I don't. She just doesn't do anything that I do. I talk about boys and all she can do is talk about football.

RH: I don't see how her being black and you being white - what difference does that make?

J: Well she just doesn't like the same things as I do. She likes to play more with people of her own colour I suppose. It's not being nasty or anything but she just likes to play with people more. She plays with Gurjit a bit and she just plays football with the boys - her own colour. She plays with white people but not as much as she plays with black people. I think she feels that she can trust them more than white people.

RH: Why do you think she feels that?

J: Well because if like I said, if I have an argument I can call each other names but if she has an argument they can't call her black because they are black as well.

Jacky develops a complex argument here. They do not get on because they have nothing in common. Among the things that separate them is ethnicity. This is different from the other factors, Jacky implies, because it is one-sided: it is Nina

who makes ethnicity an issue by preferring to play with children of 'her own colour'. But there is a good reason for this: it is nothing to do with 'cultural differences', it is that she can trust black people more because they don't call her racist names. 'Race' provides an explanation for why they don't get on, but in fact neither the accounts of other children nor research observations support Jacky's view that Nina prefers playing with black, or Asian, children. On the contrary, Nina's best friend for over a year, with whom she was very close, was a white girl, and Nina was one of the most popular members of the large group of girls in her class, the rest of whom were white. She did regularly play football at playtime, but most of the children who played, mainly boys, were white.

Jacky has constructed a racialised interpretive framework which recursively both serves to explain her problematic personal relationships and appears to receive confirmatory sanction from them. It is through the lens of her personal relationships that more general attitudes to 'race' are focused and made meaningful, as the following discussion with Jacky about name-calling illustrates.

RH: Do you think she feels that when people say things like 'blackie' to her that they are saying it because they think that white people are better than black people, and so she doesn't feel that she can trust them.

J: Yes I think so.

RH: And when people say to her 'Go back to your own country' she feels that that is different from calling someone 'fatty' or 'skinny' or 'four eyes'?

J: Well most of the time people start calling her 'Blackie' so I think it is the same as me, she starts calling them names as well.

RH: Do you think being called 'blackie' is the same sort of thing as being called 'fatty'?

J: No because I think it hurts them more because it hurts Nina because she was born in England and it's just her mother and father are Asian, but she was born here anyway.

[...]

RH: So do you think she thought when you called her 'blackie' and 'Go back to your own country' that you meant that this was white people's country and black people don't belong here and they weren't as good as white? Is that what you meant when you said it?

J: Well at the time, yes, because I thought she was born in India, but she told me that she was born in England and I said 'Well I won't call it you again' and I haven't called her it since.

The distinction between black children born in this country and black people born abroad is important for Jacky. You cannot say 'go back to your own country' to children born here, but you can to others. What was the significance of this distinction?

RH: Do you mean that you think that black people who weren't born in this country should go back to where they were born?

J: I suppose so, yes, but I like some of them. It's just that some of them I don't feel right when I'm with them.

RH: Really, how do you mean?

J: I feel on edge all the time and that I can't talk to them.

She is describing her relationships with some black children in the same terms as she expressed her insecurity with her friends. When asked why she felt this was, she qualified her remarks.

J: Well Jasmine, she's Asian I think, I can talk to her a little like but she's fun to be with. Some of them are fun to be with but it's the ones that are really mardy [*moody*] or don't like doing things that I don't get on with. I get on with most of them.

RH: Are you saying that ones that are mardy and so on you think they shouldn't live in this country?

J: No I just think I should leave them alone and let them get on with whatever they want to do, but if they come near me I won't talk to them or anything.

She was questioned further about her remark concerning black people 'going back to their own country'.

RH: What I'm wondering is then what you mean by when you said 'Yes black people who weren't born here should go back to their country they were born in'. Is that what you were saying?

J: Well it's just the ones I don't get on with. I think that if they don't get on with everybody, that if they were born somewhere else, if they wanted to come over here that they have got to try and and get on and not be nasty to people they've just come to meet.

RH: White people you mean?

J: Yes. And some of them, the ones I don't like, they're just nasty and think that they own the country. Like the white people think that no-one owns it and they let the people come in and then they just cheat them and they can come in whenever they want.

RH: Who are you thinking of when you say this? Are you thinking of children at this school or people outside?

J: People outside mainly because you're walking down the street and you see a black person and they just start, if they're older and thin and they're perfect, and they see somebody fat coming down the street they call them 'Fatty'.

RH: Does that happen to you?

J: Yes.

RH: And what did you think?

J: I thought like saying 'Why don't you go back to where you come from?'

RH: Was this a boy or a girl or a man or a woman who said it?

J: Well it's usually teenagers. It's usually boys and girls.

RH: Is it usually Asian or West Indian or both?

J: Both. No, I don't think black people call it so much, but the brown they call it me quite a lot.

There are a number of pieces of experience that Jacky brings together here. One is her experiences of finding some children difficult to get on with. This is confirmed by Nina's remark that 'none of us get on well with her'. Some of the children she can't get on with are black - but not all black children: some like Gurjit are 'mardy', others like Jasmine are 'fun'. She justifies blaming those black children who are mardy in terms borrowed from a common-place racist formulation: they have an obligation to be nice to white people because it is not their country. (She acknowledges that black people who are born here do not fit her argument, without resolving that contradiction). She finds additional support for her case in her experiences of being called 'fatty' (an issue on which she is particularly sensitive) by black people in the street: this is evidence for her that they 'think they own the country'.

These discussions with Jacky demonstrate how common-sense racist ideas achieve their power by their ability to provide convincing explanations of real problems. They also illustrate Miles' remark about racism that 'it should always be remembered that those who articulate it and those who are its object are located in a wider, complex web of social relations' (1989, p133). In the case of Jacky this can be seen working at the most personal level, deeply embedded in and impelled by the urgent pressure of the unhappiness that peer relations can cause. The distinction she makes between black people is crucial to interpreting what she is saying. When she says 'it wouldn't be fair on some of them because some of them are really nice', she is expressing her difficult and heartfelt attempts to apply a principle to experience. The principle is equality in the treatment of people; her experiences are those of being treated unequally - well by some people and badly by others. This is a fundamental feature of life which all children have to come to terms with. For some children it is more difficult than others, and it is evident that Jacky is particularly sensitive on these issues. 'Race' provides an interpretive framework which enables her to 'make sense' of them.

The idea that the dynamic towards the adoption of elements of racist ideologies comes from within her own experiences, rather than being imposed from outside, is reinforced by evidence that her parents do not seem to be their source.

RH: Are these things that you have ever talked about with your mum  
or your dad?



J: Well if I say someone has just called me 'fatty', my mum says 'Well call them something then' or just says 'Well slim down a bit then'.

RH: Do you think your mum or dad would agree that they should go back to their own country?

J: I don't know about my dad but my mum's got a lot of black friends. She gets on well with them. I don't know about my dad because he doesn't live with us.

The implication of these remarks also seems to be that Jacky gets little help from her mother in making sense of these complex and personal issues.

#### **ADAM**

Adam is a white boy at Hillside school. He is very small, and has got into a lot of trouble for reacting violently to other children when they make fun of him. He and Zabeel are friends, though not close, and Adam is only on the fringe of the group of boys that Zabeel belongs to. He spoke about racist name-calling.

A: It's like if you call them a different colour, it's like saying 'You don't belong here, you belong somewhere else with your colour'. Like that, like you're sending them away.

RH: Do you think that people do belong with their own colour?

A: No I'm not bothered.

Later he was asked to explain what he meant.

I mean I think it would be quite a good world if people were mixed up. I reckon it's everybody's world. It's not just our world, it's their world as well. I don't mean that people have to go to Pakistan - black people have to go to Pakistan - and white people just stay in England. I reckon it ought to be a mix up, because it's their world as well as our world. As long as they treat it well.

He then went on to explain the instrumental function of racist name-calling

A: Well I mean if somebody says like 'Go back to your own country', the Asians have got to do something to make them really angry before they can say that. I mean I wouldn't say that unless they did something to me and made me angry. But I've just thought that is one of their weak spots. That is another one of their weak spots if you say 'Go back to your own country, you don't belong here'. That's their baddest weak spot.

RH: Why?

A: Because they, I suppose, they know that they don't really mix.

[...]

RH: I don't quite understand. You said that you thought it would be best if anybody belonged here and everybody was sort of mixed up, but you said also that sometimes you might say 'Go back to your own country'.

A: Well if they got me angry, I would.

RH: Does that mean that you would want them really to go back to their own country?

A: No, I don't really, it's just that that's their weak spot. It just gets me so angry and I say that, and I don't really mean it. If I say that - I said it to Zabeel. He's got me so angry in the end I've said 'Sorry'.

Adam explained the incident. He had been writing and Zabeel had kept mocking his writing and nudging him.

Everytime I tried to do better he kept on nudging me, so in the end I got so angry that I said that to him. After school I said sorry. I felt really guilty because I said that and I didn't really mean it.

So far Adam has been presented in terms of a contradiction between his stated non-racist views and his willingness to use racist name-calling to retaliate against black children's 'weak spot'. Perhaps his remark that 'they know that they don't really mix' is an indication that his own views are not consistently non-racist.

Adam described a group of Asian children in the top class in the previous year. 'Nasar he used to be really bossy and he used to go around causing trouble in a great big bunch, all of them in a great big bunch, just going round stirring up trouble, beating everybody in for nothing'. They 'just wanted a bit of fun I suppose. Liked seeing people cry. But I didn't take it. Every time he hit me I just punched him back because I just wasn't taking it'. Adam was particularly vulnerable to harassment because of his size. But now they have left. 'Nasar was the strongest Asian in the school, but now there's nothing to compared to what Nasar was. They've all gone down, and we've gone a bit up'. I asked what he meant by 'we'. 'Well what I mean is like us, our colour, because they used to go up and start beating everybody in but now it's gone like down and we've grown a bit'.

From this account two points emerge. Firstly, Adam's vulnerability to tougher boys, including Asian boys whose own display of toughness might be at least partly the product of experiences of racism, as well as being a phenomenon of male

assertiveness. Secondly, the high salience of toughness and of 'race' for Adam as categories of social cognition. The playground hierarchy is understood in terms of a combination of a racialised 'us' and 'them' and a hierarchy of toughness.

This association of 'black' and 'violence' was a theme that ran through Adam's ideas about 'race'. Immediately after his account of Nasar and his friends, he began to tell a story about a man called David who lived in the flats that he used to live in.

A: He used to be really, really kind, but one day I went round knocked on his door, the door came open. I went in and went in the living room, looked around for David and he was on the sofa. He had been cut down his cheek there and there and he had all bruises all over his face because of these two Paki men who came round and I don't know why, but they just started beating him in. They've always done that. They've always run away, jumped over a wall. And I told my mum and she came round. She phoned the police.

RH: How does that fit in with what you were just talking about?

A: Well it just proves that if they don't control themselves while they are this age, when they grow up they are going to be even worse.

RH: And are you saying that that is especially true of Pakistani people or true of anybody?

A: Well I suppose really anybody. [...] I suppose it's like mugging, something like that. So I suppose really it can just prove how they can get really vicious when they grow up if they don't stop beating other people up. You see things on the telly. They take it for granted and think 'Oh I'll do that at school'.

RH: Who do you mean by 'they'? Do you mean especially Asians?

A: Yes. Asians.

He was asked what he meant by 'seeing things on the telly'. His answer revealed how his interpretation of a television text reinforced the concept of a connection between black people and domination through violence.

Well films, like people going round in their language they are saying - not in English, their Pakistan language - and just like films, like kings. There is a king sitting there and he orders his men to go and kill somebody and starts bossing them around and using them as slaves, so I suppose that is what they think.

He was then asked why he thought Asian people were more likely to behave like that than white people.

I suppose it's their mums' fault really. Mr. H [*the head*] sends loads of letters to their mums and he says 'I want this letter back and if it's not back intact, I'm going to go round and see mum'. It comes back and it says 'Dear such and such, your son is behaving very badly at school being a great big bully. If he does not pack it in in the next few days I will expel him from school'. And then the lady will sign and most of them just think it is not very good and it gets put in the bin, so they never get back.

He added that this had happened to Zabeel, and the mention of his name reminded him of another incident, one that had happened some two years earlier.

A: Now I did a very stupid thing once. I were outside and I was playing about with my brand new penknife and I was stripping a tree down with a metal bar and Zabeel came across the road with his great big brother. I don't know why, I just ran. I went 'No - my penknife'. I ran straight outside and got it and opened it up. I just got so angry I just lost control. I opened it up and said 'Leave me alone' and I folded it back up, put it in my pocket and just went upstairs. Told my mum about it though.

[...]

RH: What did they do that made you take out your penknife and say 'Leave me alone'? Did they do anything?

A: They started pushing me around. This was when I was living in the flats. They will only do it when I am outside school. They never do it inside.

When Adam was asked who was involved in this incident, he continued:

A: A few others from this school, but there were some white ones as well, and it was Zabeel's friends.

Int So were they all boys?

A: Well there were three that were girls. There were three girls and too many boys. But the one when I got my knife out was a little one. He was with them and he's in this school now. Going like this thinking that he's all brave and that, and this girl came rushing up to him and she was just about to hit me, and that's when I got my penknife out.

Int Really. She was going to hit you, the girl?



A: Yes. Because really I suppose Zabeel told her to or somebody.

This must be one of those 'critical incidents' that embody significant elements in children's lives. It was obviously a frightening experience for Adam, and not an isolated one but representative of many experiences of harassment that fill Adam's life, in which his small size is an important factor. (Perhaps it is also relevant that his parents have split up and he doesn't get on with his mother's new partner. 'Me and me dad have turned out worst enemies - I don't know why'). Personal experiences of harassment involving Asian children are interpreted in terms that reinforce racist schemas linking black people and violence, for which he finds further evidence in the David incident and the image of king and slaves from an Asian film on television. He is able to explain the connection between child and adult violence in terms of lack of parental control, and here he draws on his own experiences of complaints being made by the headteacher to Adam's mother about his own violent outbursts.

It should be noted that Adam often qualified the racist implications of his remarks. For example, after he had recounted the incidents referred to above, he was asked if he was saying that Asian people were more liable to violent behaviour.

A: No. I'm not saying every single Asian goes around beating everybody in. I mean I wouldn't be in a very nice world then would it? What I'm saying is some of them do. I reckon more

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A: No. I'm not saying every single Asian goes around beating everybody in. I mean I wouldn't be in a very nice world then would it? What I'm saying is some of them do. I reckon more

white people do it than Asians. But I suppose David did something wrong to make those Pakis get on to him.

This is more than a rhetorical disclaimer of prejudice. It is evidence of his efforts to arrive at a fair resolution of the tensions in his thinking between racial egalitarian views and racist constructions.

### **THE FOUR GIRLS**

The four girls in question are Yvette, Natasha, Hayley and Rebecca. These four formed a group of best friends in Woodshire school. Yvette was Afro-Caribbean, Natasha's parents were Afro-Caribbean and white, Hayley and Rebecca were white. These four have been chosen because their lives embodied, often very graphically, many of the themes that have been identified, and because they were particularly articulate in discussing them. For those reasons more time was spent in discussion with them than with any other children. 'Race' was a significant factor in their relationships, both those within the group and those with other children outside it, in numerous ways. It was a dimension of their relationships with other children, with teachers, with their parents, with older brothers and sisters, and with other adults. This case study describes the complex web of social relationships that made up their social world, and in particular the racialised aspects of it that they talked about.

A starting point is the basis of their friendship. Hayley and Rebecca explained.

H: I know a lot about each other. I can understand each other, like Rebecca's dad and mum have split up and my dad has split and Yvette's mum split up, so I can understand each other.

RH: Do you talk to each other about those things?

H: Yes. [...] I trust each other. [...] It's understanding. You can understand their way and they can understand the way you feel.

They were asked if there was any other reason.

R: I just mess about.

RH: What does messing about mean?

H: Have a laugh.

R: Because Yvette and Natasha are dead funny and really make you laugh.

H: They like act things and you're stood there laughing your socks off.

Their answer summed up two key elements in their relationship: the enjoyment of just being together, messing around, having a laugh, and the psychological intimacy that they shared. It should be added that Natasha shares their common experiences of family background: her father died in tragic circumstances shortly before the research began. Nearly a year after I first met them, when I knew them quite well, I asked them this.

RH: You have lots of arguments but you're still friends. Do you think it is more difficult for you four to be friends because two of you are black and two of you are white?

All: No.

RH: Or do you think that if you were four black girls or four white girls it would be just the same?

R: I'd say if I were all black girls or all white girls we'd argue more.

Y: I like each other because I talk to each other and you can tell that these two aren't racist and we're not prejudiced because we're half caste and black.

H: It's better for us because like Yvette is black and Natasha is half caste and us two are white and so you don't go criticising the black people because you know you'll be talking about one of your best friends.

They saw the ethnically mixed nature of their group as a positive feature, which had engendered a shared antiracism and trust between the black girls and the white girls.

### **Hayley and Rebecca**

Hayley and Rebecca were the two white girls in the group. In several conversations they talked about how they understood racism. The following extracts come from discussions with just the two of them.

RH: Some people say that 'there are too many black people in this country' and that 'they should go back' and that sort of thing. What do you think of that?

R: I think people shouldn't say that. I think the other coloured person should just be able to do what they like in this country the same as anybody else because they are only a different colour. Like a coloured boy and a white boy are just the same and a coloured girl and a white girl are just the same, so I think people who say that shouldn't say it because if they want to

come into this country they're welcome in this country, but some people don't welcome them with open arms.

H: Yes, people are prejudiced. They think that black people should be in black countries but if you think about it white people go to other places, like Spain. We took over Australia so it's just the same, but they live here, they want to stay here so it's up to them really.

And again:

RH: Do you think that black and white people are treated the same in this country?

Both: No.

RH: What's the difference?

H: White people are more popular in this country and black people tend to be the ones who have Rottweiler dogs and all things like that, and the police tend to think that it is the black people in this country that are the cause for all the trouble, because if you looked at a white man and then a black man you'd think the

black man was a trouble maker, but it isn't really. The white people are more trouble makers than the black.

R: Because the black look more like big and they look more stronger than the white men because they've got a better build, and I think it's because black people came to this country and the whites started it off and I think the people ever since think that they invaded our country, but really I invaded them first.

RH: How do you mean?

R: Like they all came over here but really they came over here because I went over there first. I went to Pakistan and things like that first, so they came over here, and ever since people have held it against them. It was their fault that they come over here but really it's our fault.

The two girls evinced in these and other discussions clearly antiracist attitudes in their general social understanding. How did these relate to the social relationships among the four girls?

**Arguments within the group of four girls**



Relationships among the four girls, like those between the four girls and other children, were full of conflict, often good-natured, but often hurtful. Before focusing on ways in which their relationships became racialised, it will be helpful to give a brief illustration of some of their characteristic interaction, by referring from a discussion with the four of them in which they were talking about conflicts among themselves. The topic arose because earlier in the day there had been an argument between Hayley and Natasha over helping me with something in the classroom.

H: Well I was helping you and Natasha didn't like it because I was helping you and she called me 'Brainbox' and I go 'Shut up just because I'm brainer than you' and she goes 'I'm better at running than you and I says 'So what', and then she goes 'Shut up' and I goes 'No'. Like that, and then I just burst out laughing at each other.

The discussion went on to other incidents of competition among the four.

Y: Hayley couldn't do a cartwheel and I did a cart wheel in front of the whole class and Hayley said that I was showing off, and I reckon that she was jealous. And I said to Hayley 'We've all got talents' but she goes 'Yes, yes, but at least I don't show off with them'.

A great deal of their interaction was concerned with negotiating the relationships between them. The problem was to maintain a relatively equal balance between the claims of four self-assertive individuals. In the example above, Yvette's statement that 'we've all got talents' implies that it is legitimate to display the ones that you have got. Hayley's counter-charge is that to show-off is to transgress the equality principle in the interests of dominance.

The conflictual nature of their relationships furnished the potential for them to become racialised in negative ways. On one occasion Rebecca and Hayley asserted that they never used racist name-calling against Yvette and Natasha.

R: We've had plenty of arguments but I haven't turned round to them and called them black.

H: We've had loads of arguments because I've been here since I was four. We've had loads of arguments but not once have I turned round and called them a 'Paki' or anything.

In fact this was not true. In heated arguments Hayley did, according to the other three.

R: Hayley is another one that does call Yvette a 'Paki' a lot.

Y: Most of the time, yes, when I break friends.

[...]

R: Like Hayley gets carried away when she is fighting Yvette, she will call her something about her colour.

N: She says 'Go back to your own country', and I goes 'This is our own country so you know it's not your country', and me and Yvette used to walk away.

In a discussion with Hayley she talked about calling Natasha a racist name and how it happened.

RH: You said how sometimes people say those things just because they get angry and they want to say something that will hurt somebody.

H: Well I don't think they want to say it to hurt somebody, I just think it comes out without - they don't know what they've been saying. I think it just comes out, and they don't understand what they are saying.

RH: Does that ever happen to you?

H: Yes, that's happened to me before.

R: I've never called Yvette or Natasha 'Paki'.

H: I did at one time. I was out in the yard and Natasha started to hit me and I just pushed her back and called her 'Paki' because I was really feeling to explode and then I said sorry to her, because I realised what I'd said after.

R: I think I've called somebody. I must have called somebody one but I haven't called Yvette and Natasha. I don't really bother with that.

As Rebecca put it on another occasion, 'the names start coming out, because once you've got them in your mind you can't get rid of them'.

It is in the context of the constant negotiation of relations of equality within the group that the question arose of the assertion of ethnic identity by Natasha and Yvette. It was posed most sharply in an incident that occurred as a result of some work that their class had been doing on slavery. Rebecca said it began with Yvette.

R: She was saying 'Black people are stronger. They've got more power. Black people can fight white people.' And I goes 'No that's wrong' and Yvette started saying 'You used us as slaves and everything' and then I said 'No I never' and she said that I

went over there and invaded her country. So anyway after that I said to her 'Why are black people over here then?' [...]

Y: Me and Hayley were writing notes and when I said something she goes 'Yes well I wasn't born then' and then she started swearing to me. I said 'You have to say that because you can't face facts'.

This assertion of black identity has a different meaning for the black and the white children. For Yvette, the point is a statement of positive ethnic identity drawing on black resistance to slavery. For Hayley and Rebecca, it seems that Yvette is blaming them personally for slavery. The historical issue of slavery is being translated from being part of the content of the curriculum to being part of the content of the interpersonal relationships of the children in the class. Rebecca traced the steps in this process as follows. 'Yvette goes "We've got the power" and Natasha goes to Mr. N: "Mr. N, Yvette says she's got the power"'. Yvette wasn't getting on with her work and the teacher said, according to Yvette, 'Get on with your work because you'll lose your power'. The next step occurred during the continuing debate between Hayley and Yvette, when Hayley called Yvette a 'slave' as a jibe.

#### **The racialisation of peer conflict**

The most striking feature of the accounts that the four girls gave of what happened in their daily lives was the centrality of conflict. Their stories almost always

revolved around arguments with other children, sometimes ebullient exchanges and escapades, sometimes involving heated tempers, name-calling and fighting. In school, most of this took place within the large network of girls from the two Year 6 classes who played together. It was during these heated arguments that racist name-calling mostly took place, as Natasha described.

N: Lisa was crying one day. There was me, Yvette and Becky [*Rebecca*]. I had an argument and because I had a row with Tina as well, Tina kept on calling me and Yvette 'Niggers' and everything and I just felt like calling her a name back. When she started calling us a name again I just said 'Milky Bar' or something and when Lisa started crying she got more people started crowding round her because she was crying.

[...]

N: When she started crying she had loads of attention and then she told Mr. N and then all four of them what were standing up behind the seat, then more people crammed round us to get more people on her side and I got more people on our side. They just started telling a pack of lies because she says that I thumped her in the stomach, Yvette pulled her hair, Hayley kicked her in the shin and Becky started mouthing off and

everything. And Gurjit started crying because they was all talking about dads and everyone...

Y: No, Lisa called Gurjit a 'Paki'. Gurjit was crying, and when I went up and said 'Look what you've done to her'.

(Natasha said that Gurjit was upset by remarks about her father because he had been sent to prison for drunken driving).

One of the most frequent sources of conflict situations was the relay races that the girls, together with some of the boys, organised every break time in the playground. Girls might be accused of being bigheaded and showing off if they won, or being mardy if they lost. Just as the races themselves were competitive arenas for displaying physical qualities, so the accompanying disputes were social arenas for displaying skill in conflictual social interaction. As Yvette put it, other girls 'start being mouthy and think they're hard'. It is important to recognise how strongly affected the girls were by these disputes. In talking about them, words like 'explode' and 'burst out' often occurred. This is Yvette.

I get really wound up over races when another team has cheated and they call you all names and they come up to you and push you, and you push them all back and there is a great explosion between them. I get really wound up when I've done races. I'm in a mood all day because I just can't stand it like.

The principal social function of these disputes was to renegotiate the relationships among the group of girls by allowing them to reveal their genuine feelings and attitudes to each other in an atmosphere of heightened emotions. On one occasion, after the four girls had been recounting stories of arguments they had been involved in, they were asked if they enjoyed arguments. Yvette said 'Yes, I love them. It's natural to have arguments because if you didn't have arguments then it would just be a boring life'. She continued: 'It's always your friends right and they are getting on your nerves and you want to say something you can't so when you break friends with them you can tell everything you just let it out 'I hate you'. I really like arguments that's why. And if you want to cry you just go in the loos.'

These arguments sometimes led to racist name-calling. According to Yvette, 'Most of the time it happens at playtime, like when I play games like relays and they say 'No you never won, blackies' or something like that". One incident of racist name-calling over who won occurred in the toilets after a rounders game. According to Natasha, 'we all got in a row and Sharon and Tina were calling us 'Niggers' and 'Blackies'. Tina and Yvette agreed to talk to us together about this incident. Yvette said:

Y: I were good friends before but it's very difficult now.

RH: How did you feel when she said that?

Y: Sad. Angry.



RH: Tell me about both of those, why were you angry and why were you sad?

Y: I was sad because she called me a name about my colour and I was angry because I didn't think she would say anything like that before. She hasn't said anything like that to me before.

Tina explained that she thought saying 'nigger' was the same as saying 'silly c.' to a white girl. Yvette disagreed. She said that she did not take non-racist names as seriously as racist names because 'if she says something about me it's like they are offending my family as well'. Tina said she was surprised that racist names were particularly upsetting to Yvette. 'I was surprised because sometimes she is a tough girl and she seems to take it'. Hayley and Rebecca offered the following explanation of this incident.

H: I don't think she meant to say it, it's just people get worked up and they just want to say something. Like because people call you names you have to say something back because you can't just stand there and let people call you names but I don't think Tina meant it because Tina and Yvette used to be very good best friends.

R: It's just like you have to let everything out like sometimes you feel like getting dead hot and you have to let everything out

when you go outside and you just feel like saying something that will hurt. You just get all these feelings out and explode if somebody says something nasty to you.

In another discussion with Yvette and Natasha they talked about Tina and others making racist remarks such as 'go back to your own country' and they were asked how they thought they meant it.

N: They just want to hurt us.

Y: To get at us.

Racist name-calling was a tactic to achieve interactional dominance in the immediate situation, but its social power within children's interaction derived, as they recognised, from its trading on racialised power relations in the wider society.

RH: Why do you think children do call you racist names sometimes, why do they do it?

Y: My mum always tells me that they're jealous.

N: Those who do it though they make the best of it because there's more people white than black in England so they can call you whatever they like.

Underlying the incident between Tina and Yvette were two social processes involving dominance. One was competition between the children over who won the rounders game. But intertwined with that, according to Tina, was competition over friendship relations between her, Yvette and Natasha. In the subsequent discussion with Yvette and Tina, Tina said that she wouldn't call Yvette racist names again but that she might to other children if they had an argument. When Yvette was asked how she felt about that, she said that it would matter to her because a racist remark affected all black people (As she said in another context, 'when you insult another black person that means you are insulting me as well'). Tina then said 'That's why I called Yvette a nigger instead of Natasha, because I wanted to hurt Natasha instead of Yvette'. She explained that she hadn't said this to Natasha directly because she knew that Natasha would tell the teacher, whereas Yvette wouldn't, but she knew that Natasha would be offended by her calling racist names to Yvette. Yvette confirmed that 'she was as offended as me'. Tina went on to explain how Natasha was jealous of her friendship with Yvette. It is not possible to say to what extent Tina was trying, in giving an account after the event, in a discussion with Yvette, to avoid blame. Yvette seemed to find her explanation acceptable, and acknowledged that Natasha was jealous and did try to 'stir it up a bit'. Without going any deeper into the detail of the incident, it is clear that it took place in two contexts of competition and dominance. One was the situation of competition over the result of the game. The other was competition over best-friend relationships among Tina, Yvette and Natasha.

## CONCLUSION

These four case studies demonstrate the poverty of approaches to understanding racist behaviour among children which do not situate it in the complex social world of children. The case studies illustrate both the children's general understandings of 'race' and the ways in which peer interaction can become racialised.

Conflict between children furnishes the dynamic for their relationships to become racialised. This is clearly demonstrated by the 'Salman Rushdie' incident, where racist name-calling provides a strategy for Richard and Simon to assert themselves against Imran. For Jacky and Hayley too racist name-calling serves an effective instrumental function in conflicts with black friends. These incidents need to be placed in the wider context of the children's ongoing relationships. There is always a historical dimension. In the case of Simon and Richard, it is their frequently subordinate relationship to Imran as one of the most dominant boys in the class. In the case of Jacky, it is competition for friendship relations within the girls' group and the fear of exclusion. In the case of the four girls, it is their ongoing striving to manage the conflicts that bubble up within their relationships.

These specific incidents of racist behaviour are connected to other significant racialised episodes. For Jacky, her attitude to Nina finds confirmation in her experience of an encounter with black youth in the street. The fullest illustration though is provided by the case of Adam, who connects together a series of racialised events to construct an ideological constellation given coherence by the concept of black domination through violence.

As has been argued, a variety of relationships can exist between a child's interactional and 'thematic' ideologies of 'race'. The four girls illustrate how racist name-calling can occur even with children who have well-developed antiracist views. Interpersonal conflict triggers a code-switching of social category salience, from, foregrounding ethnic identity. The case of Adam is more complex. Here, his 'legitimate defensive' stance on racist name-calling is combined with a much more heterogeneous and less coherent set of attitudes to 'race'. There is a general tendency though for the children to construct a mutually confirmatory relationship between their interpretations of their interpersonal experiences with peers and their understandings of 'race' in society. For example, for Jacky they are both underpinned by the notions that ethnic differentiation is 'natural' and that black people 'think they own the country'.

The case studies reveal that the children have developed a considerable level of social understanding, in terms both of insight into peer relationships (for instance, Jacky's acute awareness of differences in Hannah's behaviour) and of understanding of 'race'. With regard to 'race', however, black children have access to understandings in a way that white children do not. For Imran, racism means more than name-calling by classmates: that is merely one aspect of something that powerfully affects the lives of his family and community. For Yvette, slavery is not merely a topic for the history curriculum: the connection she makes with the power relationships between black and white people today holds a personal meaning for her in a way that it does not for Hayley and Rebecca.

## CHAPTER 11

### CULTURE AND 'RACE' AT SECONDARY SCHOOL

Some of the children who had been interviewed in the school year 1989-90 were interviewed again at their secondary schools. 7 children from Woodshire school and 11 children from Greenshire school were re-interviewed. The interviews were conducted individually except for Natasha, Yvette and Hayley (three of the group of four girls - the fourth, Rebecca, had moved away from the area) from Woodshire school, who were interviewed together, and Aina, Leanne and Jagdeep from Greenshire school, who were also interviewed together. The interviews of children from Woodshire school were conducted, all in the same secondary school, in September 1991, at the beginning of their Year 8, two years after their interviews in the primary school. The interviews of children from Greenshire school were conducted in July 1992, also all at the same secondary school and two years after they were interviewed in the primary school. 8 of them were at the end of Year 8, 3 of them were at the end of Year 7 (The classes interviewed at Greenshire school contained a mixture of Year 5 and Year 6 children). In total 15 interviews were conducted.

The purpose of the follow-up interviews was three-fold. To find out what their perceptions were of their experiences at primary school, especially those of the year

when the research began; to find out how they perceived secondary school, and what similarities and differences they saw with their primary schools; and to investigate their perceptions of how they themselves had changed over the two-year period.

The limited time available only permitted interviews with a small proportion of the original sample (18 out of 160). I chose to talk to 10 black children, in order to get a broad spread of their experiences. I also chose 8 white children who were roughly representative of a range of stances and experiences. 14 of the 18 were girls. The imbalance arose from my decision to choose, in the time available, children who had been particularly articulate in our previous discussions, and the majority of them had been girls.

Both secondary schools (Green High School and Wood High School) were predominantly white in their ethnic composition, and served largely working class areas. Both schools were very helpful in giving permission for the research and facilitating the interviews.

In general the children made a positive assessment of secondary school, in terms both of the official culture of the school. They commented favourably, for example, on the range of facilities, the variety of teachers, and the greater degree of freedom they had. They also spoke positively about the cultures of the children themselves. Here their comments centred on the lower intensity of interpersonal conflict. (There was one notable dissenter from this view however, Nicola at Green High School, but lack of space prevents me from pursuing her case here).

## FRIENDSHIP

The most important development that had occurred in many children's friendship relations was in the ability to manage a number of friendship relations, including close ones, with less conflict than had been typically the case in the primary school.

For some children this development took the form of mobility within a more extensive network of friends. Brenda at Green High School said of her group of friends: 'Well, one week we hang around with one group and next week hang around... Well, loads of us really. Not all from the same class'. In the primary school there had been a lot of conflict, mainly occasioned by competition for best-friend pairings within the group. Some children had deliberately adopted the strategy of minimising such conflict by avoiding 'best friend' dyadic relationships and this remained an option in the secondary school, as Jayne explained at Wood High School: 'a lot of people aren't just best friends, they just have a group of people.'

Some children showed an increased ability to manage the claims of close 'best friend' relations, and thus continue to benefit from what such close relationships could offer, within a larger group, while succeeding in minimising the possessiveness of best friend relations and therefore the conflict that it generated. This is Jacky at Wood High School.



RH: I can remember you talking to me about how you used to feel upset sometimes because some of your friends like Hannah and so on would sort of go off and you'd feel left out.

J: Yeah. That doesn't work up here though, cos you've made other friends in the group and other groups, so if one of your friends... Cos they don't just go off any more, they say 'oh can I just go with so and so for a while?' and you say 'OK, and I'll just be over here, or talking to some other people'. That's what I do with Maggie and Ellie.

RH: So there's more people...

J: More people to be friends with.

What underlay and accounted for this change was an increased awareness of the individuality and autonomy of 'the Other'. The basis of relationships had shifted from the external of shared activity to the internal of shared psychological reciprocity. It is striking how conscious some children were of this change in the basis of their relationships. This is Jayne at Wood High School.

J: We've grown up more. We've started to realise... going to each other for advice, and listen, not just go in a mood just because you don't agree, just take their advice and think about it and see

if it's right for you. We just help each other and we stick by each other and help each other out. It was sort of like complicated at Greenshire cos it was just someone to play with kind of thing. But now it's someone you can go out with and go shopping with or whatever and someone you can trust and tell your problems and stuff like that. It was like that slightly at Greenshire but sometimes you couldn't trust people, you didn't find out whether you could trust them first, you just told them something and then found out they'd spread it all round the school.

RH: Do they not do that now?

J: No, because they've realised... say I went to Becky or someone and told her a secret and told her to keep it, and she told everybody and then she told me one and I'd think well she told mine and spread it round, so we started to realise that. It's our private secrets so don't spread it round. We've become more trusting in each other too.

The recognition of the autonomy of 'the Other' is complemented by a greater confidence in the identity of the Self, and this gives rise to an increased ability to control and moderate one's own responses to difference, as Katy explains at Green High School:

Mmm, less arguments now. I used to pick up on like the little stupidest things but now I just forget it and go 'oh all right then' and walk off or whatever. I don't argue as much as I used to. At my junior school if anyone said anything to me I'd go completely over the top with arguing, but now I go 'oh yeah OK, if that's what you think that's what you think, but I think what I think' and just forget it.

The pattern of development described here was perceived by a number of the children interviewed, though there was one exception, Nicola, who admitted 'I don't like coming to school some days', and said that 'after school I don't usually come out, because I find that we argue more after school for some reason, over stupid things, and it's horrible for the next day, so I like staying in'.

All the examples given so far have been from girls' groups. The ability of the boys in the primary school to manage conflict within the group has been described. The same processes were evident in the boys' groups at secondary school. Parvinder described how conflict was managed and escalation avoided in his group of friends at Green High School.

RH     Are there many arguments in your group, with your friends?

P:     Yeah there is, quite a lot. Say they're picking on one person, he just keeps quiet, that's it, and they forget about it. [...] Say if they call you, just keep quiet for a bit, like 20 minutes, then

after that they forget about it. [...] But we don't call names often.

### THE GIRLS' CULTURE

The culture of the girls had changed greatly since primary school. It was most marked in the case of the girls in the large mixed group at Greenshire school. According to Brenda,

B: We do different things. [...] When we used to go out in the evening we used to play football but now we just walk around.

RH: What do you talk about?

B: Anything. Boys.

She was asked her why the girls did not play football much at secondary school, as they had at the primary school.

B: Growing out of it really, I think.

RH: Really? What are you growing into?

B: Gossip! [*laughs*]

Just as in the primary school playing football had enabled the girls to gain status with the boys and establish a network of friendship relations with them, so their exclusion from football at secondary school, partly out of their choice, partly under pressure from the boys, confirmed for the boys their difference and inferiority. Parvinder at Green High School explained.

P: Girls got nothing to do. Boys got, they can play something.  
We all doss about, play football, cricket, tennis. They just sit around, walk about doing nothing, cos at playtimes, dinnertimes they just walk about. We all play footie, cricket, that lot.

RH: But at the primary school a lot of the girls used to play football with the boys.

P: Down here they don't.

RH: Why not?

P: I don't know. Probably cos in the primary school there was one match, and here they're probably too scared that people will call them names if they got beat.

RH: [...] Supposing they wanted to play in your games, would you let them or not?

P: No. Cos we've got our own match.

He meant that with girls playing in the team they would lose competitive matches. Robert put it more dismissively: 'All the girls are good for is chatting and sitting in corners'. This attitude led to a considerable amount of harassment of girls by boys.

### **REGULATING RELATIONSHIPS OUTSIDE THE GROUP**

While conflict was successfully minimised *within* boys' groups, conflict *between* groups of boys was more overt. At both secondary schools there was a culture of aggressive competition among the boys, both within the year group and across the year groups. Imran described the climate at Wood High School:

They push you in the corridors or they keep on staring at you. And say if you're the hardest strongest person in the school and someone thinks they can beat you and you say 'Yeah, sure you can, let's have a fight about it'.

Robert gave a similar picture at Green High School.

RH: Is it important here to show you're tough?

R: Yeah. Cos if you don't you get your head kicked in. It's important that you're tough. Some aren't but I am.

RH: So in your class, are there some people tougher than you?

R: Yeah.

RH: Are they the ones that pick on you?

R: Yeah.

Robert said he had had a fight with a boy three weeks previously. Robert did not want to sit next to him so he elbowed him, the boy retaliated, so he punched him in the face. Robert explained that he got into trouble with the teacher but 'it was worth it', because he had reaffirmed his place in the male hierarchy: 'He's weaker than me, so he knows he shouldn't mess with the best'.

These findings confirm those of Cairns and Cairns (1986), who, in a study of adolescent boys, reported an age-related increase in the acceptance of physical aggression as a preferred technique for settling disputes with other boys. Girls, however, reported only a modest age-related increase in physically aggressive acts in same-sex conflicts. Instead, the girls reported that they tended to ignore the offence and/or ostracise the offender. This 'indirect' attack involved telling their friends about the offense and recruiting the friends' assistance in ostracizing the other girls or talking about her. Such social alienation was rarely reported by boys. According to Cairns and Cairns,

adolescent girls, relative to boys, tend to employ more socially mediated and less readily escalated techniques of hurtful actions. These techniques include the use of social cliques to ostracize other girls, spreading malicious rumors (i.e. embarrassing or humiliating information), and performing other socially mediated forms of personal abuse. Such "hidden" aggressive expressions, although deadly effective in producing discomfort and distress, are not readily traced or detected. Moreover, such covert actions are unlikely to elicit immediate or direct reciprocation. It is perhaps for this reason that, with the onset of adolescence and into maturity, the characteristics most valued by subjects in personal relationships are "loyalty", "honesty", and worthiness of "trust". They presumably detect what must be the most critical hazards of relationships. (1986, p338).

Much of the intergroup conflict took place between older and younger students. Girls as well as boys were involved in a pattern of aggressive behaviour by older students directed at younger ones, as Jayne confirmed.

RH: You said older people here don't like the younger ones.

J: Mmm. I don't know what it is. I mean, last year we were walking through the corridor and we were laughing and having a good time, kind of thing, and these fifth years walked past going 'I hate first years' kind of thing, 'I hate first years'. And



we thought *why*, what have we done, kind of thing? This is what I think, I think it's because they think they're so brilliant and older than us and they can do what they like, and they're so grown up and things like that. And like, the fifth years they all sit on the back seat and if a first year touches it they go 'No first years on the back seat!' It's fifth year territory kind of thing.

## GENDER RELATIONS

Nicola had been one of the leading members of the large mixed group at Greenshire school.

I thought that when you went to an older school you all get more mature sort of thing and start hanging round with other people, but it's not like that. They're all boys in one group and girls in the other. But I don't think it's like the girls' choice to do that, because the boys, they haven't sort of like grown up in our class, and some 'Aaargh, I'm not going with a *girl*! I want to go with a boy'. Sort of like if you go with a girl you're shameful and everything like that. But our group sort of like convinces the boys, like we go with boys sometimes. But it's boys - 'No, don't want to go with girls, want to go with my mate' [*mocking voice*]. But we like splitting the boys up so we're mixed groups.

Jayne at Wood High School also commented on the dual identity of boys. Some of them mixed with girls and related to them well in some situations, but in others they felt obliged to demonstrate a macho identity which entailed asserting themselves aggressively over girls.

J: Michael, he's really weird sometimes. It was my birthday on Sunday, and we had a party, and I invited him because we're very good friends, and he was being really nice, and just before that he started being really horrible and started ignoring us and saying horrible things, just because he was round these new friends from other schools, and he seems to be all bigheaded and macho when he's with his friends from school, but when he's with us just by himself or we're in our group where we trust each other, he's really nice. And it's like that sometimes at school when nobody's around. He goes in stages, I don't know what it is, he's been really nice today, just lately he's been really nice. Before the holidays he started being, you know, showing off and that.

RH: When you say about being macho and showing off what sort of things are you thinking about?

J: Well if we asked him to the pictures or stuff like that, round his friends. When he's not with his friends he goes 'Yeah, sure' and

he comes along and has a good time, with the girls. But when he's with his other friends he thinks 'oh no, girls, I'm not coming.' [...] He says 'No, that's sloppy, I'm not coming, I want to see an adventure film' or something like that.

Katy at Green High School had observed that when Robert, who 'sucks up to tough Neil, and his friends went on a residential course without Neil, they changed and 'revealed their true selves'. They 'laughed with the girls, not at them'.

### ROMANCE

In the last year of primary school cross-sex friendships were beginning to emerge. A process of maturational and cultural differentiation was taking place, generating a subculture of romance relationships among some groups of children. The picture in the secondary school was of cross-sex friendship becoming more common and more normal, sometimes taking the form of romance relationships, but with less pressure in terms of status. Jayne's views are representative of the children's comments.

J: Well we're all friends together now because we're not sort of 'Ugh boys' and 'Ugh girls' kind of thing so we hang around with those as well. We're all friends together. [*she gives names*]

RH: How do girlfriends and boyfriends fit into that? [...] I'm wondering whether within that group lots of people have girlfriends and boyfriends or not?

J: Maybe sometimes. Most of us are just very good friends and get on. Some of them might go out with each other one time, you know, but I think all of them are just good friends.

RH: Does it mean that people now are more likely to have girlfriends and boyfriends or not so likely to have them?

J: I don't know. I think we've realised it is not just going out with someone for the sake of it. We have to get to know them and realise who's right for us, first. We don't just go out with them because there's something they've said or something like that or just because they asked you. But we don't normally end up going out with someone we've been friends with for ages. I suppose there are single cases, but me and Malcolm we're really good friends and we talk about anything, we ask each other's advice about boys and girls and stuff like that, and then I started to like him but he said he didn't want to because he didn't want to spoil our friendship. And that's happened a few times, and it's happened to him and this girl who he likes now. And then he's realised what I felt like. But sometimes that does make it

stronger, if they go out with each other and they've been good friends before.

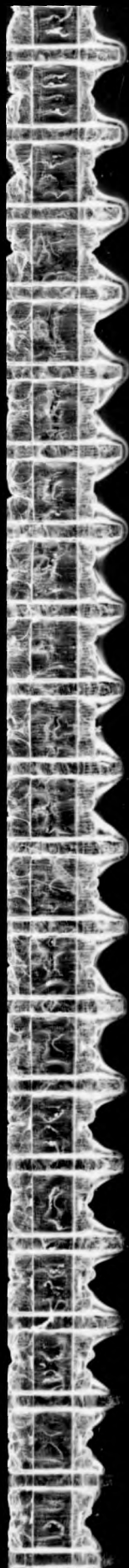
RH: Do you think there's a pressure on you to have boyfriends and girlfriends because it gives you sort of status, or is that not the case?

J: No, no.

RH: Do you think that was true of [primary school] in the last year?

J: Yes. Cos they used to be a group, and they said nobody who hasn't got a boyfriend or a girlfriend could be in it, but it isn't like that any more, we just hang around with who we get on with. It doesn't matter if they're going out, we give them advice and they can choose what they want to do, but we don't interfere or anything, if we get on with them they can do what they want. If we think it's wrong we tell them, like let them know, let them decide for themselves.

As the children have grown older some of them have been able to construct cross-sex relationships marked by greater intersubjectivity and personal autonomy. Others remain in same-sex groups. There are important gender differences. Some girls only form relationships with older boys, as Jacky explained.



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RH: Do boys and girls here hang around together a lot?

J: Yes. Well, me and Anna do. They're fourth years, they're all boys. Four boys and two... and we're at the park with them as well but there's a third year boy as well - so there's five boys.  
[...]

RH: How come you've got friends with boys who are older?

J: The boys who are in my class, if you're a girl they always...they don't...I think they are more immature than the boys that are older. Because the boys that are older, they just let us do paper rounds and things like that, but the boys in our class won't dream of going with a girl to do a paper round or something.

RH: Why?

J: I don't know. Because they think if they have a girlfriend they go around laughing and stuff like that and then they go off with their friends and just leave the girl there.

## **'RACE' IN CHILDREN'S CULTURE IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOL**

In the context of the processes of children's peer relationships described above, this section focuses on issues of 'race'. Racist name-calling and other forms of verbal abuse was by far the most common form of racist behaviour in the primary school. There was unanimous agreement among the children interviewed at both secondary schools that there was less racist name-calling in the secondary school than in their primary schools. This comment by Aina and Jagdeep was typical.

RH: Is it just the same here, or is there more of it or not so much of it?

J: Less of it.

A: There is less of it but what they say now is more hurtful than the way it was in primary school.

RH: Is it?

A: Yes, but there is less of it in many ways. You wouldn't find everyone saying it, only now and then.

Nicola, a white girl, provided personal confirmation.



When someone Indian really gets on my nerves or something like that, you can't help it, it's the first thing that comes out. But I don't say it to him, I try to hold it back. Like at primary school I would have said it, I know I would, but I try to hold it back now, cos I've realised how they feel when someone says it to them.

The children gave three reasons for this reduction in racist behaviour. The first was the development of notions of social justice and equality, and the accompanying growth of empathy. This is Jacky:

RH: What about racist names? It used to happen...

J: Mmm, yes, it doesn't happen, I don't hear many people calling them up here. Some people do obviously but most people don't. If they don't like somebody they just walk off and they don't call them names. But they do say something if they really really don't like them, they tell them to go away. But they don't call them racist names.

RH: Why not, do you think?

J: I think people know that it's going to hurt them, but in Woodshire [*primary school*] it was just like for a laugh, they

just wanted everyone to laugh at them. Most of the people now don't think it's very funny so they don't do it any more.

RH: Why do people not think it's very funny now?

J: It's just not very fair. If everybody's got something wrong with them and that's just what they've got wrong with them. If everybody pointed out what everybody's got wrong with them, everybody would be called a name. And most people know that they've got something wrong with them and if they call this person like Paki or a racist name, they're going to call them something, and they don't call that so they don't call them anything.

Jayne gave an example of how the social convention that excluded racist name-calling as a means of managing interaction was sufficiently powerfully established to override strongly felt personal antagonisms.

I've never heard Stacey call anybody 'Paki' or anything like that and I've never heard Hannah say it. Cos a lot of people... like last year, there's this girl called Bina Garcha, and she used to go to Woodshire, and for some reason she hates us, she just doesn't like us at all, and she threatened us and everything. But she's laid off now, she still doesn't like us but she's laid off, she doesn't do anything, she doesn't say

anything, and Hannah *hated* her, she really did, and so did I, but I've never heard Hannah call her 'Paki' or anything, even if she did hate her guts, she didn't use the name 'Paki' or anything like that, just used the names that she'd call other white people.

Natasha, Yvette and Hayley were three of the four friends at Woodshire School who had moved on to Wod High School. They were reminded of the accounts they had given of racist behaviour arising during the games of races that they played at primary school, and asked if racist behaviour still occurred.

Y: At higher school we're more mature now so it's not as bad, so you hardly ever get called racist names any more. If you do, you're just used to it anyway so it doesn't matter.

H: There's only about 10% what do it now.

Y: Yeah. There's more what don't really care - black, white, they're equal.

The notion of racial equality as a governing principle of social interaction is confirmed by the following brief accounts of three racist incidents, which were reported by different children as typical events. The first came from Parminder at Green High School. She explained that most white children would take a public stand against racist behaviour.

P: No no no no no. If someone says any 'Paki' word about someone, yeah, everyone sticks to the person...like Ross said 'Paki' to me, yeah, say he did, all the people come on my side and leave him there.

RH: All what people?

P: Everyone, white, whatever.

RH: Would they? All the whites?

P: All the whites unless they were really badly sucked up to Ross, you know, and do whatever Ross says.

She continued by describing an incident involving Nadia, a girl of mixed race:

P: Lee , a while back, said something about a first year, said something about Nadia putting cream on her face to make herself look white, yeah, and everyone heard about that, all the whites, everyone, went on Nadia's side, yeah. This white girl Hilary Anstey, 4th year, she started beating Lee up, started kicking him around.

RH: Why did the white people all go on Nadia's side? Is it because they think it's wrong to say those things, to say racist things?

P: Yeah, they think it's wrong, and because she's friends.

The second incident was reported by Jacky, a white girl at Wood High School.

J: Graham said, 'When are you going back to your own country?' and stuff like that.

RH: He thinks that, does he?

J: I don't know if he thinks that, I think he just says that, but most people just tell him to shut up, and 'That's not very fair'. Some of the boys laugh and then they think a bit and then when he says it again they tell him to shut up. But not many people call them anymore.

The third typical occurrence was described by Brenda, an Asian girl at Grren High School.

RH: If somebody did say something racist, what would your white friends do?

B: Well that has happened before, and no one spoke to that girl for ages.

RH: Really? What happened?

B: Well she goes like, 'All white ladies that go out with black people are slags' or something, and no one talked to that girl for ages. About two or three months, everyone stopped. She won't say anything like that again. She learned her lesson, yes.

In that context of antiracist culture, friendships between children of different ethnic groups were not uncommon, and the contradiction between having black friends and using racist behaviour was a powerful deterrent, in two respects, as Natasha and Hayley explained. First, white children were sensitive to the coherence of the moral logic. Secondly, there was the likely consequence of losing their black friends.

N: Cos you can't just call one person 'nigger slave' or 'blacky' cos you call everybody else it.

H: Yeah, you call all the other people what ... be your best friends.

RH: And when you say that 'they'd lose their friends', how do you mean?

H: Yeah, cos some of them are black. Cos if they'd called their name, right, and they've got black friends, they've sort of called it to their friends as well, haven't they, cos they're like black.

An additional deterrent to the use of racist abuse was the fear of retaliation by other children, a greater threat than in the primary school because of the existence of support networks involving authentically tough children, including older youth, as Parminder explained.

Racism? Oh, not any more. No way. Too many... there's blacks, yeah, Indians, Moslems, they get together and beat the people up.

She continued:

RH: Do people say things like that in your year?

P: Like 'nigger'? No one dare! Neil Sloman would beat them up. Neil Sloman has got a lot of back-up. Like me, I've got a lot of Indian back-up.

Parvinder confirmed the significance of support networks, and explained that they transcended the boundaries between Asian and African-Caribbean children. They were conscious of sharing a common racial identity and willing to act on that basis against racist remarks.

P: There is a bit, but no one does it to me now cos I've got some mates, big mates. [...] My friend, this boy called my friend a 'black bastard'. So my friend got this Jamaican lad, the toughest in the second year, to beat him up. The guy had a wicked fight, he had a lump on his face.

RH: What was the cause?

P: I don't know. The Jamaican heard him and, cos he's black an' all, he went up to him and hit him.

#### **RACIST NAME-CALLING AMONG FRIENDS**

One of the most common contexts of racist name-calling in the primary school was within friendships, often in the form of 'hot' name-calling when emotions were heated during an argument. In the secondary school this was less common, as a result of a greater maturity of moral development, as Jayne confirms.

Well, if we break up or something... say me and Jasmine break up, I'd never call her 'coloured' or 'Paki' or anything like that, and she would never call me 'fatty'. Same as Hannah and things like that. Just cos someone's just different to you it's not nice to use it to get at them, cos they might have a lot of it from older people and they don't need it from their friends when they just break up.



This recognition of the individuality of 'the Other' meant a much greater tolerance of individual difference and a dilution of the pressure to conform to uniform peer group norms. This was felt acutely by Gurjit, an Asian girl whose experience of primary school had often been very unhappy.

G: I used to hate Woodshire so much. I was glad when I left. But I'm free now. I didn't really like it.

RH: Thinking back, what were the things that made you so unhappy?

G: People breaking friends, being horrible to each other.

RH: Was that the worst thing?

G: That's why I hated it so much. You sat next to your best friend, and your best friend would sit next to another friend, and you just feel like...like...sometimes I sit on my own, sometimes I'm with my friends, I don't really mind.

RH: Now, you mean?

G: Mm mm.

RH: So do you think that you've changed much since then, so you don't get so upset by things?

G: More grown up. More grown up.

RH: Really? In what way?

G: I'm not crying over my friends if somebody's gone off, cos I used to do that too much. [...] At Woodshire we used to fight a lot and there used to be so much argument, but like here it's getting less. There's no fighting, no one fights with each other.

RH: Really? So what is it that's changed, that people don't behave in that way?

G: They're more grown up.

RH: What does that mean, when it comes to friends? What can you do now that you couldn't do then, when it comes to friends? [...]

G: Cos nobody really minds what anybody does now. See, it used to be like, when you were at Woodshire, somebody did something and another person did another thing, it would be like 'I wanted to do that', but now you don't really mind.

## GENDER DIFFERENCES IN RACIST BEHAVIOUR

There were important gender differences in the use of racist taunts. Boys are more likely to use racist abuse, according to Natasha, Hayley and Yvette:

H: I think more girls aren't racist, are they? More girls are prepared to be friends with black people, but I think it's more the boys.

Y: The boys can't argue things properly.

RH: You think it's because the boys can't argue so they turn to calling names.

Y: The girls have got more experience because the girls are always arguing.

H: Girls go on and they just keep on arguing till they ...

Y: Boys, they couldn't argue to save their lives. They just say names.

N: When you have an argument with a boy and the boy knows that you're going to win, the boy brings something else up so he'll

change the subject. I think it's because they've got nothing else to say.

Perhaps the most common form that the aggressive behaviour of boys took was racist taunts by older boys against younger children, mainly other boys. Jagdeep at Green High School spoke of his experience.

Every time you walk down the corridor. [...] It doesn't happen that much, you know, when you're outside round the corridor. I can't repeat some of the words they say, you know. They use a swear word in it.

He said it happened perhaps once a fortnight, and it was older boys who were responsible. It also happened outside school. He coped with it by ignoring it. Leanne, a white girl who was also taking part in this interview, had also seen these incidents.

L: Yeah, loads of times. People would just be walking along and someone shouts something. I think most of the time they can't think of anything else to say, they're just bored. I don't think most people realise just how hurtful they're being. [...] It just makes them look so small.

RH: But does it make them look big to their mates?

L: Yes, I think they think they're dead good.

The discussion continued with Leanne and Aina explaining gender differences in racist behaviour.

L: I think girls and boys do it. I think boys always need mates more than what girls do, I don't know why but they always do. I suppose girls need mates as well, but boys will do absolutely anything to get them.

RH: Jagdeep says it's always boys.

A: I think there's more boys that say it, but there are some girls who do. [...]

RH: Does that mean girls think these things but don't say it?

A: Yes.

RH: How do you know?

A: Well I don't think the girls have really got the guts to say it. [...] They're saying it so the other person gets shamed up and their mates think they're big.

## ROMANCE AND ASIAN CHILDREN

The final sections in this chapter examine developments in the relationship between children's cultures and the world of adults, with particular reference to issues of 'race'. A central theme of earlier chapters has been the relative autonomy of children's cultures from the adult world. In terms of 'race', the playground and other sites of children's cultures are contexts in which children make their own choices about the behavioural options they take up, though in ways influenced by the adult world. The most immediate regulatory influence is of course the official order of the school. A second influence is the home. Children in middle childhood may be influenced by their parents' attitudes to 'race', but they are also capable of rejecting them. Parents may be able to affect children's behaviour at home, for example by prohibiting white children from playing with Black children, but once at school their children are beyond their reach. Indeed, school is a place where racist behaviour is subject to sanctions.

However, as children move into adolescence the world of children's cultures expands spatially, temporally and in terms of content. Spatially, it moves beyond the playground and attempts to colonise the street, the park, and above all the town. Its temporal horizons extend to encompass more realistic and meaningful perceptions of the future adult. The content of children's cultures, now in transition to youth cultures, embraces new roles, new relationships, new ways of thinking and new behavioural strategies. This process of change entails a new negotiation with the adult world. The expansion of children's cultures into the adult world opens them up

to new codes of regulation. The final section of this chapter examines how these promote processes of gender and ethnic differentiation. It begins with a discussion that took place with Jagdeep, a Sikh boy, Leanne, a white girl, and Aina, a girl from an Asian Muslim background.

Jagdeep said that his parents allowed him to go to the town centre with his friends.

Leanne and Aina continued.

L: I'm allowed down town, but I've got to be good! Got to be good a couple of days before. I think you don't have that much more freedom really. You stay out later, and you're allowed further, but you don't do much. You kind of meet up with your friends and then just all walk round together.

RH: What about you?

A: Completely different! [*she laughs*] I'm not allowed down town. I'm not really allowed to go anywhere on my own. Even my brother is, even though he's younger than me. He's a year younger than me. And like, you know, if my mum says 'Go to your aunty's and get this for me', or 'Give this back to her', he's the only one picked, not me. He's a boy!

RH: Really. What do you say to that?

A: Can't really say anything about it. It's what parents say and you have to obey them. Parents should, you know, keep you properly. My parents don't really want me to get into trouble.

Her parents' views stemmed from their cultural beliefs, but they were reinforced by their experience of racism. Aina described how her brother had had his purse, with money in it, taken by older white boys when he was playing football in the park at 6 o'clock one evening.

So we're not allowed out after 6 o'clock and if we are it's with parents, because, you know, anything can go wrong.

Nevertheless, although it was the boy who was robbed, it was the girl who is subjected to greater regulation. This code of behaviour applied particularly to cross-sex friendships and romance relationships. Often these were between younger girls and older boys, for two reasons. The girls often found boys of their own age immature, while older boys also had money and perhaps a car. The younger boys were therefore often rejected by girls of their age, and this was reinforced by male peer sanctions against cross-sex relationships, as Parvinder, a boy, explained.

P: There's hardly any boy in the second year that's got a girlfriend. None in the first year. Some probably in the 3rd year. They hang around them but they don't go out with them. [...] Some boys don't want to go out with them. [...] It's a bit shameful



when you're round with all your mates and you've got a girlfriend.

RH: What would they say?

P: Start taking the rip. Cos this boy Manjit really fancies this girl, but he's too afraid to admit it, but we found out. We keep on teasing him, every day. He's really quiet now. He won't talk about it now cos we teased him for a period.

Though many Asian girls were subjected to strict parental rules, the cultures of children were a resource for dealing with this problem, as Parminder, a Sikh girl, explained.

P: Indian people, they're not allowed to go out boys and girls. They're not allowed out much.

RH: But you have been out with Indian boys?

P: Not allowed, but we do. Loads of us do. We're all doing it in the year. None of us are allowed, we all do. And we're not allowed out late so when your white friends go to you 'Are you coming out tonight? 7 o'clock?' 'Erm, what time are we coming in?' 'About half past ten?' 'Oh really. Course I can, yeah'. I

can't be allowed to be in half six! Mum just says 'You're not a kid any more, flying around outside'. They think it's like playtime or something! So I can't then. But when I'm hanging round the people of 16, 17, *they're* Indian so they know what time and everything, they understand everything like that. They're just the same. After school I go down the [...] and then we hang about and then I come in at half past. I don't say to mum and dad 'Oh I've been out with so-and-so', I'd get killed!

The ethnic differences in parental codes promote ethnic division among the children, not just because the Asian girls have to be home earlier but because Asian boys understand their problems while white children do not.

A further source of ethnic division is romance relationships, as a result of processes within white cultures and Asian cultures. While romance relationships between white and Asian children did occur, there were social processes inhibiting them, as Parminder explained when asked about mixed race relationships.

P: Not so much. I don't think not so much at all. I think not at all.

RH: Not at all?

P: Yeah. I have never been out with a white person. I don't think any Indian girl has actually. [...]

RH: Is that because white people don't ask Indian girls or is it because Indian girls wouldn't want to anyway?

P: Indian girls would, see Jagtar would, with Maysie yeah, Ross Mays, but he wouldn't. Not because of her colour or anything, it's just the way she is. I don't think Indian girls get asked much by white people anyway. I don't think I'd like to go out with a white person, not because of what they are or anything, just that they can't understand my language. [...]

RH: Have you been out with Indian boys?

P: Mmm hmm. But I ain't been out with white, no. They wouldn't be... Me, I'm always on about - white people can't understand these - I'm always on about Indian gigs, Indian music, what's at number 1, but they don't know what I'm on about. So that's why me and Jas could get on, but now Jas has stopped listening to Indian music, he's stopped watching Indian films, gone over to English and everything, and we ain't got much to talk about. Before when I first came to school Kuldip came in, I could talk about things like that, gigs and all that, that's what everything I could talk to her about, cos we talk our language, and they can't understand it, and it's better like when you can talk your

language that other person can't understand it, so you could say something that they'd wouldn't know what you're on about. [...]

It's better if that person can speak Indian with you cos they know exactly what you're on about then, about music and everything like that. That's why it's good. With a white person you wouldn't be able to explain it all

RH: Does that mean that as you get older, white girls and Indian and Muslim girls grow further apart?

P: They can do, yeah. [...] Cos some white people understand you, some people don't. [*mocking voice*] 'So you all have to go to bed do you? Have to go to bed at half six do you? Got to be in at half six, got to go to bed?' I mean there's some of them don't understand you, some do. That's the problem.

RH: Do you think when you grow up, if you have children. you'll treat your children differently or the same?

P: I'll treat them differently but I've got to do a bit of same as well. The good thing about it is like Indian people, they've got to sneak behind mum and dad's back, yeah, that's all like tricky stuff, yeah, and if we let, if I let my children go out free, go out

with whoever you want, yeah, then that would be weird because, just like white people can go out with white people, come in at any time, it would be all the same, but I want to keep that difference.

### **ROMANCE AND 'RACE': WHITE GIRLS**

The combination of parental regulation and processes within the cultures of white girls also served to promote ethnic differentiation. The decisive issue which marked the limits of some white parents' racial tolerance was mixed 'race' romance and marriage. This point came out strongly in two interviews in particular. The first was with Katy.

K: My dad, he likes black kids and Indian people and that but I don't think he'd like it if I went out with them. My mum's not bothered though. And it's the same with Rebecca's mum and dad, they're like that as well. [...] He's like my dad, he wouldn't like her to go out with a black boy.

RH: Would you go out with a black boy?

K: Probably, I don't know. Depends if he asked me to. But I probably would but I wouldn't tell me dad, cos he would kill me! But my mum's all right, I'd probably tell my mum, but my

dad doesn't know who I go out with really. But I don't go out with many boys. They're just like friends.

The second interview was with Nicola.

RH: I can remember you telling me your dad wouldn't like it if you went out with an Asian boy.

N: No, he'd hate it. He wouldn't speak to me. That's how sort of bad he is about them. If I went out with them he don't want nothing to do with me. I suppose he would, because he loves me sort of thing, he wouldn't let me go just like that, we'd have disagreements about it and everything like that, I don't think he'd turn away from me if I ever sort of thing. But I don't think I'll go out with a, or marry a black person anyway.

RH: Why not?

N: I don't know. Cos I just like people my colour. I get on well with Asian people and black people. I suppose I would go out with one, but I wouldn't marry one. It depends really, when I'm older I might see it different. And if I fall in love with someone who's a different colour I might see it differently. But at the

moment I'm doing what my dad says. Cos I don't want trouble,  
I hate it, and I get on well with my dad.

## CONCLUSION

The conclusions that can be drawn from these findings are rather more provisional than those based on the primary school data, because of the much smaller sample. Nevertheless, a number of significant themes can be identified.

There were three important changes in the cultures of the children in the secondary schools compared with the primary schools. The first was the ability to manage the competing claims of relationships, including best-friend relationships, within the friendship group, with much less conflict. In some cases this was accompanied by a widening of the circle of friends. This change applied particularly to girls, because their relationships tended to be more personal and hence more prone to conflict. The explanation for the change, which most of the children recognised, was an increased awareness, and willingness to respect, the concerns of others.

A second feature of the culture of the secondary school was the increase in aggressive behaviour between some groups. Within the age cohort, this applied particularly to boys, among whom there was an increase in physical aggression. But it was also directed by older children, especially but not solely boys, against younger children. The age hierarchy that was noted in the primary school was at least as

important in the secondary school, but its maintenance often took a more aggressive form.

The third change concerned cross-gender relationships. It occurred within the cultures of those girls' groups which, in the primary school, had marked themselves out from what they regarded as the more childish cultures of other girls. The key marker of their cultural differentiation was cross-gender relationships with boys, which involved mixed football games and the flowering of a culture of 'romance'. In the secondary school the mixed football had ceased, and romance relationships, especially by girls with boys of the same age, had declined. The result was a greater differentiation of gender roles outside the classroom, with the boys doing sport while the girls talked.

There was general agreement among the children interviewed that the frequency of racist name-calling and similar behaviour had significantly declined at secondary school compared to primary school. There were three reasons for this. Children had developed their concepts of social justice, their tolerance, and their ability to empathise with the recipients of racism. This was embedded in peer group cultures, such that incidents of racist behaviour provoked a widespread negative response from peers. This was reinforced by two other factors: the existence of many multiracial friendships, and the deterrence provided by support networks in which older black boys and girls, as well as children in the same age group, could be relied upon to deal with the perpetrators of racist incidents.



Nevertheless racist behaviour did occur. It was perpetrated more by boys than by girls, and most often by older boys against younger boys. It functioned to maintain an age-hierarchy that was also racialised, though the extent to which this reflected racist beliefs among these older boys is not known.

16. Ethnicity had become a more significant factor in mixed-sex relationships, including 'romance relationships'. Ethnicity was a more salient feature here than in other peer relationships for two reasons.

Firstly, mixed-sex mixed-race relationships had a more problematic relationship to the cultures of parents than same-sex peer relations, and were often subject to greater regulation by them. Some white parents held racist views on mixed-race mixed-sex relationships and discouraged their children from them. Some Asian parents - and the data concerning this issue in this study refers only to Asians - were opposed to their children, particularly their daughters, having relationships with the opposite sex. For both sets of parents, present relationships were regulated from the perspective of potential future marriages. A further factor affecting many Asian girls was the strict parental control over their freedom to, for example, go into town with friends or stay out in the evenings.

The second reason why ethnicity was particularly salient in mixed-sex relationships, especially 'romance relationships', lay within the consciousness and cultures of the children themselves. For some white children ethnicity was irrelevant to peer relationships restricted to the 'here-and-now', but mixed-race romance relationships

were posed in a different perspective, affected by conceptions of their future identities as adults, partners and parents. Many Asian children similarly saw their mixed-sex relationships in a different perspective, shaped both by the wishes of their parents and their own emerging identities as Asian adolescents, in which cultural factors such as the ability to talk in Punjabi, for example, were significant in their perceptions of boyfriend preference.

The combination of all these factors served to exclude at least some Asian children, especially girls, from the emerging white adolescent cultures, and particularly those aspects that most related to mixed-sex relationships.

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## CHAPTER 12

### CONCLUSIONS

The principal findings of the research will be summarised in three groups. The first set of findings relate to children's culture in general in the primary school.

1. Conflict is a significant element in children's peer relationships. There is a wide variation between children in the amount of conflict they experience in their everyday interaction with other children. The variation applies both to relationships within the friendship and outside it. Some children's relationships with their closest friends were highly conflictual: Charlotte and Vicky, and the 'four girls', are cases in point. Other children's friendship relations were largely free of conflict. One of the best examples in this study was the close relationship between Nina M and her best friend Joanna. During the day that Nina was shadowed, she was almost continuously working, talking and playing entirely amicably with Joanna.

2. Conflict often took prosocial forms, including the institutionalised competitiveness of playground games. But it also took antisocial forms, when children quarrelled. Terms such as 'bossy' and 'acting tough' were commonly used to describe forms of dominance-seeking behaviour that breached the equality principle. Sometimes antisocial behaviour took more aggressive forms, both within and

outside the friendship group. The most common form of aggressive behaviour was name-calling and verbal taunts performing a similar function. Name-calling was hurtful not only because of its overt content but also because of what it represented in interactional terms: the transition of the interaction from amity or neutrality to hostility. It marked the boundary between acceptable and unacceptable forms of conflict.

3. The wider adult society makes available a vocabulary of hurtful terms on which children can draw. These terms derive from, are indexical of (Cicourel), and help reproduce, powerful oppressive ideologies, especially those of gender, 'race' and class. Certain specific forms of these ideological configurations serve children's purposes: for example, those relating to physical appearance ('fat'; 'clothes from Oxfam') and those dependent upon notions of an ideal family form (taunts about absent parents, for example). However, the social meaning of name-calling within children's cultures is not simply imported in an unmediated way from the adult culture, in three senses.

Firstly, children's cultures select and refashion elements from the adult culture. For example, taunts about absent parents and relatives, while obviously drawing on societal notions of the ideal family, are not normally used by adults, but are not uncommon within children's cultures as perhaps the most hurtful of all terms of abuse. Secondly, some taunts that children use do not acquire their impact by exploiting adult ideologies of dominance. Some evoke marks of difference, such as having ginger hair or wearing glasses, which have a traditional significance within

children's cultures. Some, such as calling James Clark 'clacker shoes', making a connection with Clark's shoes, depend for their effect on achieving superiority through a verbal trick. But in any case, in addition to the 'substantive' content of the taunt, there is an 'interactional' content deriving from the motivation that lies behind it which has an efficacy of its own. That is why apparently hurtful terms can be understood, in the relational context, as 'only a joke', and conversely why apparently innocuous terms can be experienced as deeply hurtful, because of the significance of the motivation behind them for the relationship.

4. Underlying this discussion of the empirical evidence of name-calling is the concept of an 'interactional ideology'. This comprises the set of social knowledge, values and strategies that govern a child's peer interaction. In the discussion in chapter 7 two interactional ideologies governing name-calling in general were identified: 'hot' and 'cold'. 'Hot' refers to name-calling only in heated arguments, often between friends, and generally regretted afterwards. 'Cold' refers to name-calling as a deliberate strategy, regarded as legitimate, of self-maintenance, often of dominance. These concepts provide the basis for the more developed analysis of racialised codes of name-calling in chapter 9.

5. This study adds confirmation to the assessment of the significance and functions of friendship that is generally accepted within the research literature. More specifically, it focuses on the nature of conflict among friends. It identifies the crucial importance of best-friend relationships for many children and the painful character of conflict between best friends. Within the friendship group, competition

for best-friend relationships is one important source of conflict. The group seeks to manage the roles and relationships within by strategies such as secrets-sharing, 'negative-evaluation gossip' and inclusion/exclusion.

6. Differences were noted between boys' groups and girls' groups. Boys tended to reduce conflict within the group by deliberately adopting a number of strategies, including avoiding having best-friends, turn-taking, and excluding personal disclosure. Football functions to structure boys' interaction in conformity with these strategies. These strategies were successful in minimising intra-group conflict, but at a cost. By eschewing the greater psychological intimacy of the girls' friendships they avoided the hurtful conflicts that it could give rise to, but they also missed its advantages: greater psychological support, and the cognitive skills resulting from a high level of intersubjective perspective-taking.

7. Intragroup conflict had a different social meaning from intergroup conflict. Intergroup conflict is defined as conflict between two or more individuals who categorise each other as members of social groups. It does not necessarily entail conflict which involves two sets of group members. Four types of intergroup conflict were identified.

i) Status conflict between girls' groups.

The key markers of status were appearance, pop music preferences, playing children's games or doing sport, style of academic work, and relationships with boys. These markers indexed an age- and developmentally-related process of cultural

differentiation that was taking place among the children. The reiteration of what the higher status girls' group saw as its superiority in respect of these markers served to maintain a status hierarchy of subcultural orientations.

ii) Status conflict between boys' groups

The process was similar to that of the girls, but there was some difference in the status markers, ranging from sporting prowess and brand-name sportswear to an ability credibly to 'act tough'.

iii) Conflict between age cohorts

Age was an important factor in the hierarchical social structure of children at school. It was more salient in school than outside, partly because in the neighbourhood each child had fewer potential partners and therefore mixed age groups were more likely, and partly because the major organising principle of the official school order was age hierarchy, and this powerfully structured the unofficial order too. Among children, the age hierarchy was maintained by a range of interaction processes. Many of them did not involve conflict: on the contrary, older children often looked after younger children in various ways. But conflict was inherent in the situation too, as older children asserted their dominance and younger children sought to challenge it, often in playful ways but also in more aggressive forms of behaviour. An important element in this social structure was the existence of support networks, in which older children provided 'protection' for younger children when they were faced with aggression. The function of these relationships was to prevent and manage conflict rather than to extend it.



iv) Conflict between boys and girls

The study confirms other research evidence of the element of conflict in relations between girls and boys. It was more often initiated by boys, and while sometimes playful, could take aggressive forms. This is not to say, however, that girls were the passive victims of boys' aggression. On the contrary, there was evidence of girls successfully coping with boys' aggression, including in physical forms.

8. One mode of relationship between boys and girls which was becoming more salient in the age group of the study was 'romance relationships'. From the beginnings of their primary school careers concepts of 'boyfriends' and 'girlfriends' are significant in children's cultures, often as the occasion for playful conflict or what Thome calls 'borderowrk' across the boundaries that divide sex-segregated friendship groups. But as children approach adolescence some of them begin to experiment with cross-gender relationships of a different character. They are similar in form and content to same-sex friendships in many ways, but shaped by the dominant heterosexual culture of adolescent and adult society. 'Romance relationships' are often playful and ephemeral; their content is intragroup rather than interpersonal. But some children formed more stable 'romance relationships' with a level of intersubjective intimacy comparable to that of their same-sex best-friendships.

Findings nine to thirteen relate specifically to 'race' in the primary school.

9. Racist name-calling was a significant feature in the lives of black children. There was a very wide range in the frequency of experiences of racist name-calling by different black children. For some, it was almost a daily occurrence. For others, it happened very rarely, though they remembered them as significant events. The difference in frequency was not accounted for by the ethnicity or the gender of the recipients. The determining factor was the frequency of involvement in conflictual situations in general. When these involved black children they tended to become racialised.

10. Three codes of racist-name calling were identified: 'illegitimate defensive'; 'legitimate defensive'; and 'legitimate dominance'. While the outcome in terms of racist utterances was the same, the meaning of the episode both for the user and the recipient was very different in each case.

11. The study explored the beliefs about 'race' that children held. There was a spectrum of attitudes. Some children held explicitly antiracist views. There was evidence, both from children's self-disclosures and from reports by children of other children's behaviour, of a significant number of children holding racist views. These two categories were not clearly defined and mutually exclusive. On the contrary, many children occupied the middle ground where the two categories overlapped. Their views were a combination of racial egalitarianism and racial prejudices. The explanation for this inconsistency does not lie primarily in an attempt to disguise racist views or to present them in as 'reasonable' (van Dijk), but in real contradictions within children's commonsense consciousness. This is a

characteristic feature of common sense in general (Gramsci), and it seems likely that it is particularly true of children in late childhood, for two reasons.

The first derives from the stage of cognitive development they are at. While criticisms have been made of the Piagetian model of cognitive development for underestimating children's abilities (e.g. Donaldson 1986), it is generally accepted that children in late childhood have not fully mastered the conceptual functioning which Piaget refers to as 'formal operations' and Vygotsky calls 'mature thinking' (Fontana 1988). This stage of intellectual functioning is characterised by the child's ability to manipulate mentally several ideas at the same time, and to see the relationships between them.

The second reason is the distinctive character of children's social understanding in late childhood. While their social relationships with their peers are still embedded in the relatively autonomous cultures of childhood, children's awareness of the adult world (beyond that of their personal relationships with adults), while still limited, is increasing rapidly. The concept of 'thematic' ideologies of 'race' was used to refer to the set of beliefs about 'race' that the child holds. Children's thematic ideologies of 'race' are complex and multi-level. They comprise ideological elements circulating in the wider society, including those transmitted by television and the press, though always as 'read', and therefore subject to reinterpretation, by the child. They include the child's perceptions and interpretations of personal experience of 'race' in the adult world: the street, the pub, the park, and perhaps above all the family. But they also include the child's experiences and understandings of 'race' within peer

relationships and children's cultures. The child therefore is subject to multiple and heterogeneous interpellations of 'race'. The conceptual integration of them is the difficult socio-cognitive task which children in late childhood are engaged in, and perhaps especially problematic is the integration of the two disparate domains of social understanding which the child inhabits, that of the adult world and that of the cultures of children. This needs to be seen as an ongoing process of change and development.

It is not surprising, therefore, to find that children in late childhood display inconsistencies in their attitudes to 'race', as to other issues which straddle both social worlds.

12. The question was considered of the relationship, in terms of issues of 'race', between behaviour and belief. The evidence of this study disproves the notion that behaviour and belief are linked in a simple one-to-one relationship. On the contrary, racist beliefs may be accompanied by non-racist behaviour, and racist behaviour may occur without being the expression of racist beliefs. The concept of 'interactional ideology' was used to convey the idea that the child's social behaviour is governed by a personal ideology comprising social goals, values, social knowledge, interpretive procedures and a repertoire of interaction strategies. Negotiating social life entails dealing with multiple problem situations as they occur. Interactional ideologies therefore, while they may be reflexive, are above all, of necessity, also pragmatic 'ideologies-in-action'. The nature of acting in the everyday

social world inevitably tends to generate change, inconsistencies and contradictions within interactional ideologies.

Thus both thematic ideologies of 'race' and interactional ideologies may show internal inconsistencies. Where they overlap is when the child, the bearer of more or less formulated, more or less coherent, set of beliefs about 'race', is faced with acting within real-life racialised situations. Here the combination of the two ideological ensembles may generate a complex field of variables, whose overall outcome may be a congruence or an inconsistency of 'belief' and behaviour, as the case studies in chapter 10 illustrate.

Each of the case studies attempts to capture the complexity of this field of variables, and how the child grapples with it, not just in one social episode but across a number of racialised episodes. In chapter 9, the analysis of single incidents of racist-name calling is more limited in scope, and it has been possible to theorise them in terms of a model of six racialised interaction codes. Each represents a specific combination of 'thematic' and 'interactional' elements which has a distinct social meaning for the participants.

13. Apart from name-calling and similar forms of verbal racism, the other principal form of racist behaviour found in the study was exclusion. It was difficult to ascertain if children's friendship relations were affected by patterns of racial exclusion. The small proportion of black children meant that inevitably many friendship groups were composed only of white children. Conversely though, almost

all the black children were in mixed-race friendship groups. nevertheless, there was some evidence of exclusion of black children, though it seemed to occur most overtly in the home situation, where the behaviour of white children was most subject to influence by their parents and the white community.

The second area of exclusionary processes which were identified were more complex. They operated within the emerging culture of cross-sex relationships, including those of boyfriend and girlfriend. (The evidence of this study relates only to Asian children in this respect). The process of cultural differentiation which was taking place as the children moved in different ways towards adolescent identities was racialised in several respects. Firstly, differences in home cultures meant that many Asian children, especially girls, were excluded from activities, such as going to town and staying out late, as well as having boyfriends, which were permitted to their white counterparts. Secondly, children were divided by the ethnic differentiation within adolescent culture: for example, by preferences for white or Indian pop music. Thirdly, some white parents were hostile to mixed-race mixed-sex relationships for their children. Fourthly, some white children shared that prejudice. The cumulative effects of these social processes beginning at primary school age can be seen more clearly in the secondary school.

The remaining findings arise out of the follow-up studies conducted in the two secondary schools, and are of a more provisional character.

14. There were three significant changes in the cultures of children in the secondary school compared to the primary school experience. They were more successful at managing conflict among friends, particularly the girls. There was more aggressive behaviour outside the friendship group, particularly among boys, and especially by older boys against younger ones. There were changes in relations between boys and girls: greater gender-differentiation, and less same-age romance relationships.

15. There was a decline in racist behaviour, particularly name-calling, in the secondary school. A greater tolerance of others was embedded in group norms, partly as a result of increased psychological maturity, partly as a result of the many multiracial friendships. The existence of support networks involving 'tough' children, including older relatives and friends, provided an effective deterrent to racist behaviour.

16. Ethnicity had become more salient in the context of romance relationships, partly because of the greater influence of parental racist prejudices in this area of children's lives, partly because of factors within children's cultures, including cultural differentiation and the situating of romance relationships within a perspective of their future identities as adults.

### **THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE FINDINGS**

Hammersley (1990) suggests that the significance of a research study can be evaluated in terms of the extent to which the empirical findings can be generalised,

and the extent to which theoretical inferences can be drawn from them. This separation between the generalisation of empirical data and the development of theory needs to be questioned. No two items of empirical data in social research are identical, and therefore generalisation is always mediated by conceptualisation, as Silverman (1993) points out. The question is not *either* empirical data *or* theory, but the degree of theorisation of data. Each concrete event is a specific combination of abstractions. For example, one social process identified in this study is of racist name-calling by a white child of a black friend, followed by an apology, as in the case of Angelina and Nina. The evidence of this study is that this is a not uncommon sequence of events. While each specific occurrence is unique, in terms of the personalities of each child, the history of their relationship, and the social situation itself, each episode conforms quite closely to the same pattern or social script. In this study it is theorised as a particular racial interaction code, one of six variants, which themselves are generated by concepts at a higher level of abstraction: the notions of racialised thematic and interactional ideologies, which govern the whole range of racialised social interaction processes of which the example of racist name-calling among friends is one.

It is in the context of these prefatory remarks that the significance of this study can be evaluated. To begin with, the relationship of the findings to the research literature reviewed in chapters 1 to 5 will be considered in summary form.

This study strongly confirms, and complements, the literature on children's cultures. Two social processes in particular are central. One is the importance, nature and



functions of children's friendships. The other is the pervasiveness of conflict in children's relations, and its causes, characteristics and consequences. These two decisive social processes express the competing dynamics of equity and dominance that structure children's peer relationships. The study also confirms some of the findings of research into youth cultures: in particular, the validity of applying the concept of culture developed within youth studies to children in middle childhood, in both its senses. Culture as a concept embraces both structure and agency. Culture is problem-solving: it is a set of ways of thinking and behaving shaped by the heuristic concerns of routine day-to-day social interaction. But the cultures of children (like those of other social groups) are also shaped by the parent culture of the wider society and the social structures that underpin it. The study illustrates the dual character of children's cultures most clearly with regard to the issue of 'race', provided detailed evidence in confirmation of the perspectives of Hall and Miles referred to in chapter 4.

The study confirms the significance of racism in children's lives that is demonstrated by other research, but goes beyond the limits of more quantitative studies to reveal the social and cognitive processes in which 'race' is embedded. Concepts of 'thematic' and 'interactional' ideologies, and the centrality of contradiction in common-sense consciousness, drawing on Gramsci, provide the theoretical framework within which Turner's notion (following Tajfel) of switching between social identities is deployed to explain the racialisation of conflict. incidents.

The compatibility of the empirical findings of this study, and their conceptualisation, with those of the major relevant bodies of research literature furnishes compelling evidence of its validity. The claim that is being made for their generalisability needs to be clarified in more detail. A starting point is provided by the notion of typicality. The typicality of the findings varies within the study itself. Some of the findings applied to all, or virtually all the children: for example, their involvement in friendship groups. Some of the findings applied to a proportion of the children, perhaps a small proportion: for example, black children who were frequently involved in racialised conflict situations. The reliability of the findings is reinforced by their similarity across the three primary schools (and their similarity to the findings of the pilot study in two other primary schools). There is no reason to suppose that the schools themselves were not typical of thousands of other primary schools, in their social composition and internal regimes. It is reasonable to conclude that the social processes identified in the three primary schools are likely to be typical features of children's cultures in middle and late childhood in England. However, the generalisability of this study is not ultimately dependent on the supposition that children's cultures in different schools and geographical areas is isomorphic with those in the three schools here. What is being claimed is that this study has shed some light on the deep structure of social processes which generate a heterogeneous array of cultural features which come together in a specific combination in each school situation and in each cohort of children to form unique but comparable configurations.

This claim needs to be evaluated by further research studies, including ones of school situations with very different ethnic compositions from those in the three schools in this study. There are a number of other issues raised or touched upon in this study which would benefit from further research, including the following:

- the relationship between children's cultures and the 'official culture' of the school - including the effect of school policies on children's racism;
- the relationship between children's cultures and family cultures;
- the development of children's cultures over time, from childhood through adolescence;
- gender in children's cultures, including its relationship to 'race';
- the development over time of the relationship between racist behaviour and racist beliefs, in order to clarify whether non-expressive racist behaviour during childhood increases the disposition towards adopting racist beliefs during adolescence.

Finally, this study has implications for what adults, and especially teachers, might do to tackle racism among children. Though this lies outside the scope of the study (mainly for reasons of space), it is worth briefly drawing out the central points. First, 'race' and racism is a significant feature of the lives of children. black and white. Secondly, it is deeply embedded in, and often motivated by, the social

processes of children's cultures, and therefore cannot be addressed effectively without taking account of that context. Thirdly, many children have a great deal of insight into themselves, their peers and their social world. Fourthly, many children have a considerable understanding, even if perhaps not entirely accurate, of racism. Lastly, while some children hold racist views, they may coexist with more egalitarian attitudes, and there is a large proportion of children who are committed to racial equality. This represents a vital basis for antiracist policies and practices in schools. It is hoped that this study makes some contribution towards their development.

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